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182

REVOLUTION 1956: FIFTY YEARS ON

- Charles Gati on Failed Illusions
- God Bless the Hungarians! – A twelve-year-old's diary
- Inside the American Legation
- Poems by Zbigniew Herbert, Adam Ważyk, Edwin Morgan, Jules Supervielle and George Gömöri

SIGISMUNDUS REX ET IMPERATOR

- Paul Crossley and Ernő Marosi on a major exhibition

- The Early Years of Hungarian Athletics
- The First Anglo-Hungarian Soccer Matches 1901

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The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XLVII • No. 182 • Summer 2006

3 *Emperor on the World Stage*
Paul Crossley

6 *Sigismund's Moment in Art History (Illustrated)*
Ernő Marosi

21 *Poems, translated by David Hill*
Zoltán Halasi

27 *English Influences on Modern Sport in Hungary. Part 2*
Miklós Zeidler

47 *Athletics and Diverse Peoples*
Lajos Molnár

49 *The English in Budapest*
From the magazine Sports World

54 *Pickaxe (Chapter from a novel)*
György Dragomán

REVOLUTION 1956

63 *Notes to My Childhood Diary*
Gyula Csics

70 *God Bless the Hungarians! Part 1*
Gyula Csics

104 *Poems*
Zbigniew Herbert, Adam Ważyk, Edwin Morgan, Jules Supervielle, George Gömöri

109 *A Major Oversight on Our Part*
Geza Katona, interviewed by Zsolt Csalog

132 *Fifty Years Later*
Charles Gati

CLOSE-UP

147 *How Many Histories Do We Have? (Ágnes Losonczi)*
Júlia Szalai

BOOKS & AUTHORS

159 *Sons Without Fathers (György Dragomán, Krisztián Grecsó)*
Miklós Györffy

166 *Wallenberg: Man and Myth (Lajos Török)*
Ulf Zander

MUSIC

169 *Early and New Polyphonies—New BMC Releases*
Paul Griffiths

THEATRE

173 *Private History (Ignác Nagy, Kornél Hamvai, István Eörsi)*
Tamás Koltai

Cover photograph: *Provisioning insurgents on the Great Boulevard in Budapest. Probably October 30, 1956. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Hungarian National Museum Historical Photographic Collection.*

Paul Crossley

Emperor on the World Stage

Sigismundus rex et imperator: Art and Culture in the Age of Sigismund of Luxembourg, 1387–1437.
Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, 18 March–18 June, 2006.
Luxembourg, Musée national d'histoire et d'art, 13 July–15 October, 2006.

In the last five years, a series of spectacular international loan exhibitions have thrown a wholly new light on the artistic patronage of the great monarchs who dominated northern European art in the late 14th and the 15th centuries: *Gothic Art for England 1400–1547,* in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 2003; *Paris 1400—The Arts under Charles VI,* held at the Louvre in 2004; *Art from the Court of Burgundy 1364–1419,* held in Dijon also in 2004; *Gothic Art in Slovakia,* in Bratislava 2003–4; and most recently, *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347–1437,* which opened in New York in 2005 and is now under display in Prague. All these monarchs—Henry V of England, Philip the Good of Burgundy, Charles VI of France, Charles IV of Luxembourg—and their courts contributed to the spectacular flowering of what we used to call the International Gothic Style. But one great international and royal voice was, until now, curiously silent: the voice of Hungary and of its flamboyant, cultured and politically assiduous king and emperor, Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437). In my experience, Hungary had always been the *eminence gris* of later medieval European art—a country of exquisite, but mysterious culture. When I was a student in Cracow, many years ago, my Polish professor, when asked about a particularly exquisite late medieval or early Renaissance object in Poland, would reply, with hushed wonder: "Ah, that is Hungarian". But how, or why, or when it was Hungarian always remained a mystery. Now, thanks to this spectacular exhibition, *Sigismundus rex et imperator,* Hungary's vital contribution to the international "court culture" of later medieval and early Renaissance Christendom has been magnificently recognized.

The sheer size and international scope of this enterprise makes it one of the most significant exhibitions of recent decades to be held in Hungary. One hundred

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The above is the shortened text of an address given at the opening of the Sigismundus exhibition in Budapest.

and twenty institutions, from 19 countries, are lending a total of about 400 objects. The international range is hardly surprising, since the hero of this exhibition, Sigismund of Luxembourg, was a king and emperor who bestrode the world stage. His coins, seals, medallions and the vivid portraits of him gathered in this exhibition, particularly the profile by Pisanello, present a universal, knightly figure from some medieval Romance, surrounded by the trappings of a luxury culture. The vast hall of his palace in Buda—a palace which rivalled Windsor, Avignon and the Louvre—was the envy of ambassadors; the sculptures discovered there in 1974—some akin to the work of Claus Sluter and André Beauneveu, some to Austrian models—all count among the most sophisticated figure carving of their date anywhere in Europe.

Sigismund's knowledge of humanist Italian culture, like his father Charles IV's, was precocious. His journey to Rome for the imperial crown in 1431–3, and the exotic attire of his retinue, attracted the attentions of Pisanello and Filarete. Masolino came to Hungary, though nothing of his work survives here. The close relations, cultivated by Sigismund, between his court goldsmiths and those in northern Italy explain the precocious use of Italian filigree enamel in Hungary, to be seen in the exquisite Transylvanian host reliquary and the spectacular reliquary bust of St Ladislas—both in the exhibition. Sigismund's foundation of the Order of the Dragon—similar to the chivalric Orders of the Garter in England and the Golden Fleece in Burgundy—gave a new sense of identity to the Hungarian aristocracy, and—combined with his motif of the fiery cross—elevated Sigismund into a second Constantine, a crusader defending Christendom from the very real menace of the Turks. Dragon emblems pepper the objects in section 4 of the exhibition.

This exhibition dispels the old caricature of Sigismund as a flamboyant knight-errant, or as a 'foreigner king', called the "Czech pig" in an attack on his foreign entourage in 1401. The exhibits show him as a legislator, a founder of Buda's university, an avid reader of military treatises (some exhibited here), a tough diplomat who enjoyed the intellectual challenges of politics, and a reformer who listened to his Franciscans' prophecies of a utopian empire enjoying universal peace. He was the last king to try to invest the title of Holy Roman Emperor with real meaning. Above all, he brought Hungary into European politics and allowed it to participate in the great issues of the age: Hussitism, the Turkish threat and, most importantly, the international Council of Constance—where Sigismund's central position was commemorated in Ulrich Richental's *Chronicle* of the Council, a manuscript owned by Sigismund, a later copy of which is exhibited here. Sigismund, like his father Charles IV, was not a great bibliophile; but he learned from his father the importance of harnessing political claims to public imagery, as well as how to strengthen dynastic ties by generous artistic patronage. The superb reliquary bust of King St Ladislas, which Sigismund gave to Nagyvárad (Oradea) in 1406, was modelled on his father's bust of Charlemagne given to

Aix-la-Chapelle and was calculated to cement Sigismund's relations with this most popular Hungarian patron saint—just as his decision to be buried at Nagyvárad cathedral, next to St Ladislas, conjoined the two figures in eternity.

This exhibition is too intelligently conceived to fall into the trap of equating Hungarian art with Sigismund alone. It opens with a masterly account of the brilliant Hungarian art under the last Angevins, and the strong continuities between Angevin and Luxembourg patronage. And it is acutely aware, with other recent critiques of "court styles", that Sigismund's art is not a unified and "centred" value system, but something diverse, fragmented, essentially federal, possessing the character of a complex system of local, as well as international, knowledge. Thus, the exquisite *Pietà* from Nagyszeben (Sibiu), dependent on both Buda and perhaps Austrian sources, is testimony of the extraordinarily high standard of the Buda workshops penetrating far from the capital. The female saints from Barka suggest the liveliness of the Kassa (Košice) architectural and sculptural workshops, a town in the far north of the kingdom, supported by Sigismund as part of his pro-urban economic policies, but showing a distinctly local profile in comparison with Buda "court" art. The antiphonal of Pozsony (Bratislava), commissioned by the cathedral, belongs to one of the richest chapters in one of the most important of Sigismund's residences; yet, its artist was probably trained in Bohemia. And the sublime Calvary Altar from Garamszentbenedek (Hronský Beňadik), painted by Thomas de Coloswar in 1427, one of the towering masterpieces of this exhibition—and of the whole of International Gothic Art—was commissioned by Sigismund's court cantor of the royal chapel, but shows a kinship to Austrian, Bohemian and Italian models. Sigismund's art was nothing if not eclectic. The sculptures, manuscripts, liturgical objects and panel paintings exhibited here show us, for the first time, the riches of the medieval kingdom of Hungary and of its neighbours. In this, it sheds a new and astonishing light on one of the most culturally sophisticated monarchies of Catholic Europe.

And in addition to this exhibition, we have, as its permanent memorial, a superb catalogue, richly illustrated, intensively researched, bringing together a multi-national *equipe* of leading scholars and experts. In a triple-language edition of German, French and Hungarian, it stands, side by side with the exhibition, as a triumph of scholarship and organization. ❧

Ernő Marosi

Sigismund's Moment in Art History

Sigismundus rex et imperator:
Art and Culture in the Age of Sigismund of Luxembourg, 1387–1437.
Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, 18 March–18 June, 2006 and
Luxembourg, Musée national d'histoire et d'art, 13 July–15 October, 2006.

The historical personage invoked by the title of this exhibition, and in its attendant publications, would never have inscribed himself as *rex et imperator,* and anyone who did so would have been certain to find themselves out of his favour. (This in spite of the fact that, in line with the provisions of the German Golden Bull issued by his father in 1356, he would have been able to speak Latin, German, Italian and Czech.) The curators of the Charles IV exhibition *(Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347–1437),* held partly in conjunction with this exhibition, first in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, then in Prague, were nearer to the truth when they plumped for the title of "emperor by the grace of God". Neither designation, however, includes the listing—ever-present in medieval documents and royal seals—of all the countries over which the person in question ruled as prince, king or emperor. The appearance is given that one of the two (the father) ruled over Bohemia, the other over Hungary; in both cases, however, they did so merely as kings. As emperors, both were the crowned heads of "the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", and prior to that bore the title of German King. Both of them, in the 19th century (when Czechs and Hungarians were incorporated in the Habsburgs' Austrian empire), became "our" emperor in both Bohemia and Hungary. The *"rex et imperator"* is completely the reverse order to that demanded by medieval protocol and this reversal is, to Hungarians, evidence that it is the Latinization of a familiar line in the historical ballad *"Szibinyáni Jank"* that the poet János Arany wrote in 1855 *("Sigismund, king and emperor...").*

Thus, summoning up a bygone age with even the slightest pretensions to historical authenticity is no easy matter these days, given that even the manner in

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The Luxembourg Dynasty in Art History: Publications 2005–2006

■ *Prague: The Crown of Bohemia 1347–1437.* Edited by Barbara Darke Boehm and Jiři Fajt, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005.

■ *Karl IV. Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden. Kunst und Repräsentation des Hauses Luxemburg,* Prague Castle, Catalogue (in preparation) edited by Jiři Fajt, Deutscher Kunstverlag, München–Berlin.

■ *Sigismund von Luxemburg. Ein Kaiser in Europa. Tagungsband des internationalen historischen und kunsthistorischen Kongresses in Luxemburg, 8–10. June 2005,* Proceedings edited by Michel Pauly and François Reinert, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 2006.

■ *Sigismundus rex et imperator. Művészet és kultúra Luxemburgi Zsigmond korában 1387–1437. (Sigismundus rex et imperator. Art and Culture in the Age of Sigismund of Luxembourg); Sigismundus rex et imperator. Kunst und Kultur zur Zeit Sigismunds von Luxemburg (1387–1437); Sigismundus rex et imperator. Art et culture au temps de Sigismond de Luxembourg 1387–1437.* Catalogues of the exhibitions in Budapest and Luxembourg edited by Imre Takács, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 2006.

which one designates the protagonist is open to dispute. The exhibition's principal aim, which is to present the art and culture of that age in such a way as to make its relevance clearer to us today, seems a simpler task. (Simpler, even if one is well aware that, in Sigismund's time, people would have had a very different understanding of the concepts of king or emperor, presuming that the titles meant anything to them.)

The exhibition is taking on the seemingly even more hopeless task of attempting to bring the culture of a submerged era closer to a modern-day "educated public" by drawing attention to its relics. This first presentation of the material remains of the period when Sigismund ruled over Hungary aims to awaken both the Hungarian and a wider international public to the fact that the cultural heritage of Hungary, blank spot that it may seem from a distance, also makes a significant contribution alongside the English, French (specifically, in Paris, in the ducal courts of Burgundy, Berry and Anjou) and Bohemian court art of the years around 1400, which has featured strongly in recent years. A splendid ambition it is, too, for a member nation of the European Union to wish to make its historical heritage common property. Yet if the domain of this presentation is art history, its goal must necessarily be to display some characteristic aspect and, possibly, to demonstrate a prosperity that set out from somewhere in Hungary to impinge upon European culture as a whole. Obviously, the point of such an undertaking would be to justify a claim that the half century between 1387 and 1437 in which Sigismund ruled as king of Hungary (and from 1411 as elected and, from 1414, as crowned German king, then from 1420 as king of Bohemia, and from 1433, as Holy Roman Emperor) was accompanied by a major turn in art history, a shift towards the art of the

modern age—our own culture. This would be a shift comparable in significance to, for instance, the beginnings of the Italian Renaissance, or the emergence of painting in the Low Countries, or French court culture in the International Gothic style. Given our current knowledge, the timing of such turning points cannot, as a rule, be precisely defined. If hopes are held out for a shift of such major dimensions during Sigismund's fifty years on the Hungarian throne, we should not expect to be unable to pinpoint that accurately. Given that he himself was not a creative artist and that his unselfish patronage of the arts is disputed, it is therefore only possible to speak about "Sigismund's hour" or "moment" in a metaphorical, even journalistic, sense. Still, it is not uninteresting to ask about the timing of a process that saw the emergence of modern traits, including a demand that works of art should have an individual mode of expression.

We are accustomed to using stories to tell about processes and turning points, their antecedents and their consequences. Art history is just as much about the telling of stories as history itself, only whereas the subject of the latter is more or less determined (crudely: "man"), that of the former is illusory, artificial: "art". Yet, this is the narrative to which we relate our impressions concerning works of art, locating them within it as best we can, or adjusting it to fit them. The intention behind an exhibition such as this, with its ambition to explore and familiarise, is nothing less than a revision of art history's "European" or "universal" "grand narrative". This grand narrative's equivalents and parts are the small ones: the separate stories about individual works. There are as many of them as there are observers and narrators. These narratives may rank among the art historian's most warily guarded secrets, not to be uttered, much like the name of a divinity or a magic spell, but they exist nonetheless. In reality, every story of origins attempts to account for how what we see and what we strive to explain came into being. Here I shall try to tell a few parallel stories about a single work of art from the Sigismund period, a work that is also one of the most important relics of medieval Hungarian art: the silver reliquary bust, or herm, of Saint Ladislas, undoubtedly one of the least damaged of surviving early 15th century works of art. Furthermore, the general impression it creates has hardly altered, due to its considerable precious metal content. Those who have the chance to see it from close up, as do visitors to these Sigismund exhibitions of 2006, will find it hard to resist the effect it has. They will be able to delude themselves that they have gained a direct insight into time itself, into a distant past.

The connoisseur's first recognition, transposing personal impression into historical experience, is that the reliquary bust quite closely matches descriptions of the ideal type of the Hungarian king-saint as expressed in chronicles, hagiographies and hymns. These clearly concern the literary recording of a kingly ideal that emerged in the early phase of the Hungarian Middle Ages (the 11th and 12th centuries); the impetus was the composition of the liturgical and hagiographic texts around the canonization of Ladislas, initiated by Béla III in 1192.

These texts show St Ladislas as "a pillar of Christian valour, a true hope of his people" *(O columna militiæ christianæ, / o firmissima spes tuae gentis)* and "invincible defender and champion of the country" *(sis defensor indefessus / et athleta patriæ).* His appearance itself manifested his sanctity: "Ladislas' aspect was worthy of a sovereign, his dignified countenance worthy of a host of angels" *(Ladislai species digna fuit imperio / veneranda facies angelorum consortio);* "he had a strong arm and a winning face and in build was mighty as a lion" *(Erat enim manu fortis et visu desiderabilis et secundum phisiognomiam leonis magnas habens extremitates),* or in other words, "by his very build, which resembled that of King Priam, showed him in imperial splendour" *(speciali tamen prerogativa ipsa corporis physiognimia, ut species priami imperio digna declararet).* That is why the antiphone of his feast-day declares "We honour Ladislas, whose head is to be dignified in a royal ceremony with a crown of precious stones" *(Ladislaus honoratur, / Cuius caput coronatur / Regum ritu generoso / De lapide pretioso).*

It would be hard to give a more accurate description than that of the appearance and dignity of this reliquary, originally made for the royal saint's burial place in the cathedral of Nagyvárad (Oradea) but since the 17th century held in Győr Cathedral. It is, however, worth reminding ourselves that these are not descriptions but texts antedating the making of the silver reliquary by more than two centuries, texts kept continuously alive in the cult. In other words, they are not interpretations of the work of art, but the inspiration which prompted its creation. In the course of the restoration of the herm, completed in 2006, the surface was cleaned of the patina that had accumulated over the centuries; it turned out that the original gilding of the silver is still intact, against which stand out the silvery white of the eyes (originally completed with irises of blue enamel) and of the teeth in the half-open mouth. A hymn, known in both Latin and Hungarian versions from the latter half of the 15th century, makes references to a triumphal bronze equestrian statue that was raised to the saint in 1389 by the brothers Martinus and Georgius of Kolozsvár during the reign of King Sigismund and his first consort, Mary of Anjou (destroyed during the 17th century): "Your likeness, placed on a high wall, shines like the sun, glitters like gold. None can have enough of beholding your countenance" *(Tua imago sita est in muro alto, / Splendet ut sol, fulget ut aurum, / Haud sat est visu te contemplari).* Restoration also offered an opportunity to gain an insight—literally, by examining the inner side of the *repoussé* silver leafs on the bust's head—into the goldsmith's working methods. Those observations confirmed the hypothesis that what we have is a reliquary bust that in all its parts is in its original condition, essentially unchanged, except for the crown. (The crown, replacing the medieval original, was made in Prague in 1600 and is a masterpiece of mannerist court art in the age of Rudolph II.)

The art historian's first task is to tie to a specific era a devotional object which has been evoked by identical idealized texts that span centuries. There is a clear contradiction between the devotional reception of an object imbued with an aura and the historical approach of a connoisseur out to explain not the presence of

sanctity as such but its possible realization in the art of a given period. Much of the history of the genesis of the Győr reliquary is unknown, but it seems highly likely that it was made in Sigismund's reign: there is the evidence of a document that the king issued at Nagyvárad in 1406 on the occasion of his declaration that he had chosen the city's cathedral as his burial place. The document which listed the properties with which he endowed the cathedral on this occasion also mentions the damage to the cathedral's sacristy and treasury "a few years earlier" owing to a fire caused by a gutted candle: apart from the incinerated documents and treasures, a receptacle containing St Ladislas's head and relics had melted down, though the relics themselves had survived undamaged "as did the burning bush of Moses of old." For an art historical narrative this alone is given, the fixed point (an indefinite one at that: "a few years" before 1406) of the destruction of an earlier reliquary. A great many narratives are still conceivable, however, depending on one's information and assumptions.

The first and most obvious approach was to take local pride, so to speak, as a starting-point: the desire to restore the medieval see to its former glory. Throughout her career, Jolán Balogh, a scholar specializing in Hungarian art's connections with Italy and in the legacy of the proto-Renaissance, concerned herself with reconstructing the art of Nagyvárad, publishing the fruits and documents of her research at the end of her life, *Váradinum—Várad vára* (Varadinum, Fortress of Várad), a book that was published in 1982. Written sources apart, there are only fragments that testify to the medieval cathedral and the culture of the then highly influential see of Bihar and to the cathedral's pre-17th century fabric. Its most famous 14th-century relics, the bronze statues by Martinus and Georgius of Kolozsvár, were so renowned that they are mentioned in numerous descriptions, yet nothing at all would be known about the brothers' art were it not for a surviving Prague bronze equestrian figure of St George that bears their names and the date of 1373. Their work at Nagyvárad ran from around 1370, when they cast nearly life-size standing statues of Hungary's three royal saints—St Stephen, St Emerich and St Ladislas—right through to the completion of an equestrian statue of St Ladislas on a high plinth in 1389 (1390 according to one record), but the statue in Prague is the only way of gaining an impression of their style—and this gives no hint of how that style may have been changed or modified. Ever since the brothers were discovered by art historians (first by the Saxons of Transylvania, soon followed by Hungarians and eventually Germans and Czechs), efforts have been made to explore ramifications of their art, primarily in the bronze casting of the Angevin era (craft objects such as bells and baptismal fonts) or goldsmiths' work. Late 19th-century scholars thus came to ascribe a substantial portion of the output of court goldsmiths in the age of Louis the Great (objects donated in 1367 and 1381 to the Hungarian chapel attached to the Minster in Aix-la-Chapelle) to the activity of Transylvanian Saxon craftsmen. Subsequent Romanian art historians followed suit.

The truth is that there is no criterion of any kind to demonstrate a correspondence between miniature figures made by goldsmiths and the lost monumental bronze

statues. There is, of course, a possibility that a St Ladislas reliquary really was produced at Nagyvárad around 1406 on the model of the renowned work of the brothers; it is less likely, however, that this could have been their own work (for some unknown reason, Martinus is usually singled out from the pair of masters, even though they invariably inscribed their names together). If they were in their thirties around 1370, the likely end of their stay in Italy (a journeyman's tour, combining work and the gathering of experience—as far as we now know they spent the mid-1350s in Orvieto), and thus in their fifties at the time of making the Nagyvárad equestrian statue of St Ladislas; by the first decade of the 15th century they would have been in their late sixties. That does not rule out the possibility of their being active, as it would fall within the compass of a long working life. Nevertheless, the artistic qualities of the Győr reliquary cannot be explained or inferred from the Prague St George, and we ought therefore to view it as the work of an artist of a younger generation, someone who concerned himself both with the representation of sanctity and with the rendering of vitality.

Gyula László, the distinguished archaeologist of the Middle Ages, recognized these two aspects, and the theory he developed in the late 20th century is both imaginative and thought-provoking. He made an exhaustive study of the reliquary, but what he had to say was scattered in numerous publications rather than published in a single monograph. Thus this summing up inevitably carries a risk of arbitrariness, all the more so given that my approach to his views is critical. Gyula László insisted on the internal unity of the Nagyvárad tradition. In his view, the unity and hieratic solemnity of the Győr St Ladislas herm reflect the validity of an archaic ideal of sainthood and are themselves archaic in origin, going back in time to his canonisation at the end of the 12th century. On the basis of the anthropological conclusions drawn from his examination of the skull in the reliquary, he supposed that the reliquary went back to an earlier and, in its own terms, faithful portrait on the king's presumably figural sepulchral monument. He presumed that monument to have been naturalistic, and from the open mouth of the corpse as it lay on the bier, he derived the manner in which the mouth is represented on the reliquary. László also seemed to entertain the idea that the 15th-century reliquary might even conceal within itself a 12th-century part of a head from the time of the canonisation.

This hypothesis, reverently nurtured by his disciples, received more than customary publicity in a quite unusual fashion. The new permanent historical collection at the Hungarian National Museum that was opened in 1996 featured a galvanoplastic copy of the face of the Győr herm combined with a copy of the burial crown of Béla III, who had initiated Ladislas's canonisation. Not much later, this odd combination, with its features made to look more natural (yet still recognizably inspired by the reliquary)—obviously with the intention of suggesting the physiognomic unity of the Árpád dynasty—found its way onto the ten-thousand-forint bank note now in circulation as a likeness of King (Saint) Stephen I. From the suggestions he propounded in successive publications, it did not emerge

whether Gyula László decided that the *gisant* of the sepulchral monument at Nagyvárad after 1406 was the model, or that a Romanesque reliquary had been supplied with its splendid chest decorated with filigree enamel cells. The reservations from art history that arise here are based on the fact that not only is there no evidence for the existence of the figural sepulchral monument but that, even if it did exist, the naturalistic appearance or portrait character that is ascribed to it (or possibly to the skull reliquary that survived despite the fire) was totally anachronistic for this time.

A current appraisal of the place of the St Ladislas reliquary in art history may be set on two footings. One of these was elaborated by Éva Kovács, one of the principal specialists on the Hungarian Middle Ages, most notably the history of its court art. She died in 1998 without having put together (some shorter essays and catalogue entries aside) her thoughts on the work. She had a very thorough grasp of medieval figural reliquaries, and she placed the St Ladislas herm within a series of majestic large-scale reliquary busts headed by the one that Philip IV (Le Bel) had made for the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and which was destroyed at the time of the French Revolution. This, with its at once hieratic and—as the bust form in itself underlines—life-like appearance and its heraldically ornamented, enamelled bust, was also a model for the reliquary for Charlemagne's skull that the Emperor Charles IV commissioned for the Minster at Aix-la-Chapelle. Éva Kovács also developed a theory for the artistic source of the enamel ornamentation of the St Ladislas herm. The filigree enamel technique was undeniably fully established well into the 15th and the 16th centuries, and in those areas of Central Europe across which it was distributed it was often referred to as the Hungarian style of decoration. Supplanting the plethora of conjecture about Byzantine, Venetian and Northern Italian roots proposed by scholars ever since they began writing about the history of the applied arts in Hungary, Éva Kovács stressed the links with goldsmith techniques for luxury and other objects produced for the French court. The plates of enamel sprinkled with golden stars or dots that are characteristic of the bust of the St Ladislas herm are a style of decoration that is particularly close to the French *émail plique-à-jour.* This is typical of early filigree enamel, and most assuredly of the scabbard of the ceremonial sword that Sigismund bestowed on Friedrich der Streitbare, Elector of Saxony, in 1425, and also of the chalice that Benedek Suki donated to the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) around 1440 which is now in the Treasury of Esztergom Cathedral.

The Sigismund exhibition in Budapest offers an opportunity not least to make comparisons of some major filigree enamel relics. These include the splendid Visconti chalice from Monza and the enamelled chalice from Pozsony Cathedral (Bratislava) that, albeit not filigree, is likewise ornamented with sprinklings of stars. Then there is a 15th-century gospel book from Nyitra Cathedral (Nitra) with the goldsmiths' work of the cover incorporating a relic of the True Cross, along with filigree enamel medallions and symbols of the Evangelists, counterparts to

which may be seen on a standing crucifix from Nagydisznód/Heltau in Transylvania (Cisnădie). These data and links in themselves show that the filigree enamel technique cannot be considered as being Transylvanian in origin, its broad diffusion pointing more to the role of a court centre.

The other mainstay for a modern-day appraisal of the St Ladislas herm is a group of statues that were discovered in Buda Castle in 1974, which have proved decisive in recognizing the character and European significance of art during the reign of Sigismund. Without them, for any ideas about court culture in that age we would have to have recourse, even today, to dubious conclusions and vague conjectures drawn from sporadic remains. The clarification of the status of the statue find necessitated the mounting of the first exhibition devoted to the art of the Sigismund era at the Budapest Historical Museum in 1987. Under the circumstances of that time, all that could be accomplished was to bring together the body of material that, for the most part, was accessible in Hungary alone, while flagging international connections in a catalogue that was assembled almost along the lines of a wish list.

Those wishes—and, thanks to more recent research, many more in addition—have now been granted in this 2006 exhibition. Foremost among them is a confrontation with the relics of that era and a claim to reconstruct the artistic context. A consensus may have emerged regarding the stylistic roots and antecedents of the Sigismund-era Buda statues, but assessments of their chronology, and hence their significance for the history of style, differ widely (extending from the 1390s to the 1420s). What is not disputed, however, is the marks left on the statues by the handiwork of a group of master craftsmen who worked on the ornamentation of St Stephen's cathedral in Vienna. The influence can also be demonstrated on a group of statues that came from Grosslobming in Austria—that is, the Paris style of the 14th century—and perhaps even as late as around 1400. It is likely that others were influenced by André Beauneveu's style in particular, as transmitted via Brabant and Cologne. Today we recognize this sculptural style as a Central European parallel and alternative to the Bohemian Beautiful Style of around 1400 that, guided by modern stylistic prototypes, superseded the sculptural work of the mason Peter Parler, who flourished in Prague during the reign of Charles IV.

Today, what seems to be one of the most characteristic aspects of the Sigismund-era Buda statues, and an aspect pointing to the future, towards 15th-century realism (both in the Low Countries and Italian) that supplanted the Soft Style, is their aspiration to vitality. That aim is expressed through a formula applied to descriptions of antique monuments: they were but a hair's breadth away from not just looking alive but actually coming to life. This placing of such high store on vitality was one of the central elements of the early humanist *ecphrasis,* or characterization, of which Pier Paolo Vergerio was the master. Active earlier at the court of the Carraras in Padua, Vergerio entered Sigismund's service at the time of the Council of Constance. He spent the remaining years of his life in Hungary. The

vehicle of that vitality on the Sigismund-era Buda statues is the portrayal of the mouth as half-open, as though just about to speak; this was an important device for conveying pathos in art around 1400, from the heads of Christ of Bohemian Pietàs in the Beautiful Style to the paintings of Pisanello. It is found within the area of influence of Buda sculpture, including a head fragment from a group of red marble royal sepulchral monuments found at Bogovác in Bosnia that in all probability were carved in Hungary; it is present in the head of a centurion in a 1427 altarpiece of the Crucifixion painted by Thomas de Coloswar for Garamszentbenedek in Upper Hungary (Hronský Beňadik); it also plays a part in portraits of Sigismund himself (one in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna). This is the element that endows the Győr herm of St Ladislas, for all its stiff calm and hieratic symmetry, with the appearance of a living presence.

In the catalogue of this Budapest exhibition, the Sigismundian Buda statues are dated "between 1400–1420", which corresponds to the period when building work on the palace may well have been going on. Eberhard Windecke, Sigismund's biographer, recalls the extensive work that was undertaken in connection with his return from the Council of Constance in 1419. The great hall of the palace, built at the time, is mentioned as the venue for events at which, among others, the Byzantine emperor and King Eric of Denmark were present in 1424. In that same period, on land between the palace and the city of Buda, St Sigismund's church was built as a royal chapel. Excavations showed that the same craftsmen worked on the sculptural ornamentation. The Győr herm of St Ladislas is dated in the catalogue as "after 1406". One other work of essentially the same date features here: a skull reliquary of "after 1400" from Trencsén (Trencín) that is now held by the Hungarian National Museum. There has been much speculation about the function and artistic connections of this reliquary and its portrayal of an unidentified bearded saint (including the role claimed for it as a reliquary of St Ladislas). All that can be said with certainty is that it differs stylistically from the Győr herm in being the work of an earlier generation of artists, most likely from around 1380.

We also encounter this same problem of a dating that falls between the Angevin age and the early Sigismund age within the St Ladislas herm itself, for the head part of this bust that is definitely of the Sigismund age conceals an inner silver reliquary, which certainly had to have been produced earlier than the head accommodating it, as the internal structure of the latter provides a perfect fit. The setting for the silver reliquary bust is, in point of fact, of an elliptical silver case for the skull. Its lower closing plate is provided with a lug that allowed the relic to be taken out and, most probably, displayed (for a kiss or touch or the taking of an oath). Intersecting bands affixed with hinges encased the upper perimeter. The engraved and enamelled decoration of the bands includes a central medallion containing the enthroned *Maiestas domini*. On the stems, enclosed in foiled frames, are the zoomorphic symbols of the evangelists with scrolls bearing their names. The catalogue denotes this mounting, differing in style from the external bust of St Ladislas, as being 14th-century work from the Angevin age. The affinity

of technique and style to that of Angevin goldsmiths is unquestionable, yet that does not mean it could not have been produced in the early 15th century, immediately after the Nagyvárad fire: one thing that is obvious about the first two decades of Sigismund's reign—above all his seals, given that the moulds for these would have been produced by the court goldsmiths—is the continuity of artistic practice from the preceding era. More recent research has produced many reasons arguing for an artistic continuity between the age of Louis the Great and the early Sigismund years as regards architecture and sculpted architectural ornamentation.

My own take on the history may be outlined as follows. The St Ladislas reliquary, on which a good number of dissatisfied barons who rebelled against Sigismund in 1403 swore an oath of allegiance to King Ladislas of Naples, who had landed in Dalmatia in pursuit of his claim to the Hungarian throne, perished in a fire at Nagyvárad prior to 1406. We do not know if this conflagration in the sacristy had anything to do with the rebellion and Sigismund's reprisals, or possibly even (given that the archive also burned down) with removing any traces of these. At all events, in 1406 Sigismund conducted an inspection of the scene, and he showed his attachment to St Ladislas, whom he esteemed as a paragon of chivalry, by designating the cathedral as his own burial place. This is likely to have been when the inner case for the relics was created, while the reliquary bust would only have been made a good deal later, not earlier than about 1420, during the construction work at Buda and the most intensive period of its sculptural ornamentation. This is the second phase of art at Sigismund's court, in which what Sigismund experienced in his extended journeying abroad (from 1412 to 1419) undoubtedly played a role.

Elected German king in 1411, Sigismund's absence began in 1412 with stays in northern Italy and the southern Tyrol that were connected with his campaign against Venice, and continued with the negotiations that he conducted in Lombardy to prepare the way for the Council of Constance, then his coronation in Aix-la-Chapelle at the end of 1414. When the Council of Constance was in session, Sigismund went off from 1415 onwards, first of all on a long trip to Perpignan that was aimed at healing the Papal Schism, then in 1416, after the battle of Agincourt, on an attempt to conciliate France and England. In 1419, on his way back home from the Council, he marched through southern German cities on the banks of the Danube.

A great many things were held against Sigismund: his frivolity, his fickleness, his political intrigues and his improvidence. Only comparatively recently has it become quite clear how personally, and with evident relish, he threw himself into his artistic enterprises. There can be little doubt that in this respect he is one of the very first of a new type of patron, one typical of the modern age. In the course of his travels, he acquired drawings first in Siena and later in Avignon, of the Papal Palace—plainly to be used as models for his own subsequent buildings. Wherever he went, he employed local craftsmen and artists; in Cologne, and later in the

A brief chronology of the life of Sigismund of Luxembourg

1368 Sigismund is born as the younger son of Charles IV of Luxembourg, Holy Roman Emperor, King of Bohemia (1346–1378), and Elizabeth of Pomerania.

1373 King Louis the Great of Hungary (1342–1382) and Charles IV conclude a marriage contract between Princess Mary of Anjou and Prince Sigismund. In 1376, Sigismund's father makes him Elector of Brandenburg, where he is brought up. Charles IV dies in 1378. In 1379 Sigismund moves to Louis the Great's court in Hungary.

1382 On Louis the Great's death, he is succeeded on the Hungarian throne by his daughter, Mary. In Cracow, Sigismund attempts to win the Polish crown by offering himself in marriage to Louis' younger daughter, Hedwig (1384–1399).

1384 A faction of the Hungarian nobility led by Miklós Garai, the Palatine, concludes an agreement on the engagement of Queen Mary and Louis, Duke of Orleans.

1385 Sigismund marries Queen Mary. Charles of Durazzo, King of Naples, is crowned King of Hungary by the aristocrats of Croatia, but a few weeks later he is assassinated in a court plot. In 1386, his Croatian supporters murder the Palatine and capture Queen Mary, together with her mother, Elizabeth, who is also murdered. With the help of his cousins, Jost and Prokop, Margraves of Moravia, Sigismund assembles an army and manages to free his wife.

1387 Sigismund is crowned king of Hungary.

1395 The pregnant Queen Mary dies after falling from her horse. She is buried in the cathedral at Nagyvárad (Oradea, Romania).

1396 In the crusade against the Ottoman Turks, who have been expanding in the Balkans since 1389 and are starting to threaten Hungary's southern borders, the Christian knights suffer a disastrous defeat at Nicopolis at the hands of Sultan Bayezid I. Among those who fall prisoner to the Turks are John the Fearless, heir to the throne of Burgundy, and Maréchal Boucicaut. Sigismund escapes via Constantinople and makes his way home to find his country in a state of unrest, requiring him to resort both to force and to a largesse that places a large burden on the royal domains.

1400 The Holy Roman Empire's Electors depose Wenceslas IV, King of Bohemia, as King of the Romans and in his place elect Rupert III of the Palatinate.

1401 Sigismund is captured by a faction of Hungarian aristocrats and only obtains his release at the price of an alliance with the Garai and Cillei families. After he is freed, Sigismund imprisons his elder brother, Wenceslas IV, and has himself appointed regent of Bohemia.

1403 The lords of Hungary's southern territories invite Ladislas of Naples to Hungary and swear an oath of fealty at Nagyvárad. Sigismund puts down the revolt, but Ladislas continues to hold (then in 1409 sells back to Venice) the cities of Dalmatia that had come under the rule of the kings of Hungary following Louis the Great's victory over Venice.

1405 Sigismund marries Barbara Cillei.

1408 Sigismund wages war to have his rule over Bosnia recognized and for greater security against the Turks. He defeats King Tvrtko I of Bosnia, and afterwards enters into an alliance with Prince Hervoja. He also (with the aim of securing recognition of his chosen Habsburg successor) founds the Order of the Dragon.

1410 The Order of the Teutonic Knights, which Sigismund supports, suffers a decisive defeat at the hands of Wladislaw II of Poland at Tannenberg.

Reliquary bust of St Ladislas

Győr, Cathedral Treasury

Cast, *repoussé,* and engraved silver-gilt; enamel; height: 64.7 cm

(The crown was made in Prague, 1600)

According to the view expressed here, this bust was probably made in Buda around 1420 for the cathedral of Nagyvárad (Oradea), centre of the cult of the sainted king of Hungary, Ladislas I (1077–1095). Parts of the partially gilt surface were enamelled (such as, originally, the irises of the eyes). The *repoussé* decoration of the chest is filled in with filigree enamel plates, the earliest example of this technique known in Hungary

Setting for the skull reliquary of St Ladislas
Győr, Cathedral Treasury
Partially gilt, *repoussé,* engraved and cast silver

The setting has an elliptical shape following that of the skull. Fitted with handles on the lower portion, it was meant to be placed in the head reliquary with its convex side facing downward. This positioning was no doubt taken into consideration when the object was made. The setting, according to the view expressed here, was made in 1406 or soon after.
While the silver setting follows the shape of the skull (the cheekbones and eye sockets are clearly indicated), the fornix extends beyond the upper perimeter. Here intersecting bands affixed with hinges encased this upper portion of the skull. The bone could be seen and touched in the spaces between the bands. (Records on the judicial proceedings of the Chapter of Várad since the 13th century attest to the custom of swearing on the head reliquary of St Ladislas.) The engraved and enamelled decoration of the bands includes a central medallion containing the enthroned *Maiestas domini*. On the stems, enclosed in foiled frames, are the zoomorphic symbols of the evangelists with scrolls bearing their names. Although the setting corresponds to Angevin period silversmith practices, this does not exclude the possibility that it was made in the first two decades of Sigismund's rule, when traditions of court art still remained unbroken

Ceremonial sword of Friedrich der Streitbare, Elector of Saxony
Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Rüstkammer, VI/361
Sword: iron, with brass inlay; the hilt clad in silver-gilt, with rock crystal and enamel, wrapped in silver-gilt wire; height: 118 cm
Scabbard: wood, red velvet, *repoussé* silver-gilt, filigree enamel; height: 91 cm, width: 7.3 cm

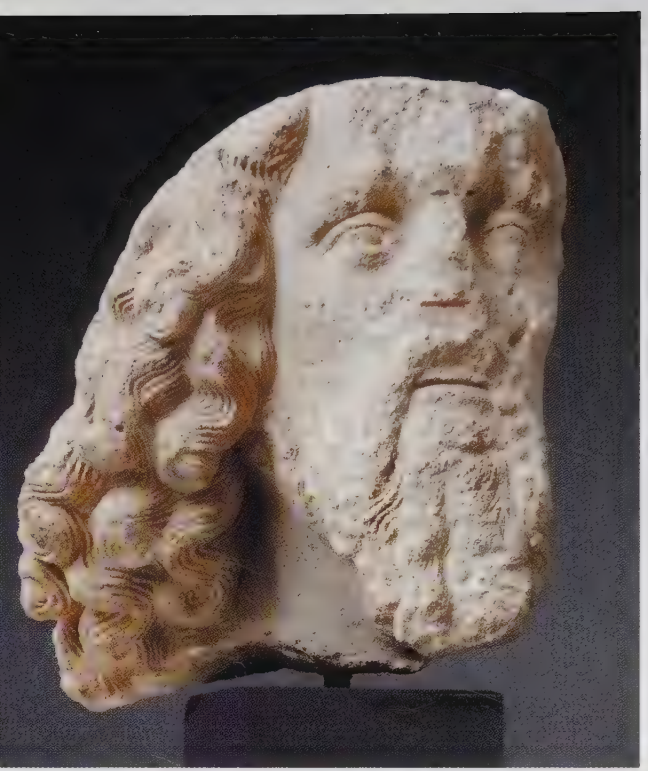
Friedrich IV, Margrave of Meissen of the house of Wettin, who was elevated to the electorate by Sigismund in 1423, received this sword in Buda in 1425. In all probability the sword was then kept among the regalia of the elector-princes in Saxony. The sword may have been made in Buda using a blade from Passau. The scabbard is the only early Hungarian example of filigree enamel that can be precisely dated

Benedek Suki's chalice

Esztergom, Cathedral Treasury, 1964.21.1

Repoussé, cast, chased, silver-gilt with filigree enamel; height: 27.3 cm

This magnificent chalice, whose detailed inscription describes it as a gift of the Transylvanian nobleman Benedek Suki, belonged to the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) until 1556, when it was added to the archiepiscopal treasury in Nagyszombat (Trnava). The name of the donor, whose coat of arms appears on the base, occurs in written sources beginning in 1423 until his death in 1456. The relief decoration on the chalice refers to the Redemption, while the cast figures refer to the community of saints. This is the most splendid example of early filigree enamel and, in general, Gothic Hungarian goldsmith work. It was made around 1440 (or perhaps in 1437, according to a concealed inscription).



Head fragment from the statue of a man (king?)
Budapest Historical Museum, 75.1.40
Limestone, height: 22 cm

In 1974 a fragment belonging to an approximately 180-cm-tall standing figure, part of the Buda castle statue find, was uncovered. No other details from the figure could be established. Stylistic features indicate the statue belongs to a group attributed to a stone carver (or workshop) that played an important role in the carved ornamentation of Sigismund's buildings in Buda. This carver or workshop was also associated with a Viennese workshop responsible for the statues found in Grosslobming. One can argue about the date of this statue from Buda on the basis of the debated chronology of the Grosslobming workshop (most likely period of its flourishing around 1410) and the similarly debated time period of Sigismund's building activity (probably begun around 1410, although contemporary sources link them to his return home in 1419; the palace and the Church of St Sigismund were already in use in 1424). The realism of the Buda statues, surpassing that of the Beautiful Style, suggests the date of 1420. This head most clearly recalls portraits of Sigismund

Portrait of Sigismund of Luxembourg
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, GG 2630
Oil and tempera on parchment,
glued to a wood panel, 58.5 x 42 cm

This portrait, a proven part of the imperial collection since the 18th century, was identified with the help of a 16th century medal with an inscription. The depiction of Sigismund was intended to be an intimate portrayal rather than an imperial representation of the ruler. As such, he appears without his regalia, distinguished only by his characteristic fur hat, which is just as regal in its own way, crowned with a splendidly simple jewel of pearls and precious stones. The date and the identity of the artist are in dispute. The attribution to Pisanello would mean a date of around 1433, and thus would probably show an older Sigismund than the one seen here. The other, more likely candidate is a master working in Central Europe, in Austria or Bohemia, in the 1420s. The liveliness and general type of the portrait are basic features of that concept of personality which characterizes the head reliquary of St Ladislas. The most striking feature in the portrait is its immediate intimacy, while in the head reliquary it is the solemn majesty of the holy king

Thomas de Coloswar: Calvary altar from Garamszentbenedek (Hronský Beňadik), 1427

Esztergom, Christian Museum

Wood, tempera. Central panel: 242 x 177 cm; the original width when open: approximately 354 cm. Reconstruction.

The altar in its opened position, showing scenes from the Passion, can be reconstructed. The outer pictures of the sawn-apart wings, depicting legends of saints, have all been preserved, but for one. The predella, destroyed by 1905, was decorated with Sigismund's coat of arms with eagles. The inscription on it identified both the painter, Thomas de Coloswar, and the donor, Nicholas, son of Péter of Szentbenedek, a lector-canon of Győr and cantor of the Royal Chapel, thus providing evidence of the work's connection to the royal court. The painter certainly acquired his skills in the early decades of the 15th century in the environment of the Prague painter of the *Martyrologium Usuardi* of Gerona. Like other painters in Prague, he probably left during the Hussite uprising and returned home.

Thomas de Coloswar: Head of the centurion; detail from the central panel of the Calvary altar from Garamszentbenedek (Hronský Beňadik), 1427

In the Calvary scene, a Roman centurion appears with a Turkish head covering. His face reflects his profession of faith inscribed on the scroll, in which he acknowledges that the crucified Christ was indeed the Son of God. Its animated expression closely resembles what is found in the portraits of Sigismund, which led to frequent assertions by early art historians that this was a hidden portrait of the king

Imperial grand seal of Sigismund of Luxemburg
Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, 1435.I.25
Wax impression, diameter: 133 mm

Sigismund's chancellery made a detailed description of the seal commissioned in Constance in 1417 from Arnold de Boemel, a jeweller, who had worked in Paris. The date, however, presents one problem: the legend on the seal lists among Sigismund's titles that of King of Bohemia, a claim he could not legally have made until after Wenceslas IV's death and his own coronation in Prague in 1420. Therefore, it is possible that the seal, which was not used until 1433, was made somewhat later. The innovative depiction on the obverse shows the portrait-like depiction of the emperor on his throne supported by a pair of two-headed eagles – in the way of Alexander the Great – accompanied by the personal insignia of Sigismund's Order of the Dragon. On the reverse is a two-headed eagle, elevated from its heraldic function to a sacred symbol by the halos around the eagle's heads, referring to Ezekiel's vision of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Sigismund steers the Church's ship to safety, illustrated in Winand von Steeg's work Adamas colluctancium aquilarum, 1418–19
Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Palat. Lat. 412, fol. 66r
Vellum, ink, watercolour, 320 x 235 mm

Winand entered Sigismund's service at the Council of Constance and arrived in Esztergom (Gran) in the company of Georg von Hohenlohe, governor of the archbishopric of Esztergom. There, the German cleric completed his tract illustrated with his own symbolic drawings, in which he expounds on the symbolism of the imperial eagles. After his departure, he dedicated his work to Louis, Elector of the Palatinate, and it was preserved in the library of Heidelberg university. This picture is an allegory of the Church's ship, and expresses Sigismund's awareness of his calling: the mast is the Cross of Christ, the sail the Gospel, and the King steers the ship to the gate of Paradise.

Embroidered emblem of the Order of the Dragon
Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, T3792
Linen embroidered with gold and silk thread, stuffed with wool, 27 x 39 cm

The three-dimensional embroidered emblem corresponds to the description of a dead dragon with a cross-shaped wound in the Order's 1408 deed of foundation. The emblem may have been appliquéd to clothing or to some kind of textile – either secular or ecclesiastical ornaments.

Emblem of the Order of the Dragon
Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kunstgewerbemuseum, 1903.44
Cast, chased, engraved, silver-gilt, height: 3.7 cm

The small emblem, which was probably sewn onto clothes, was found in Livonia; thus, it probably belonged to the insignia Sigismund presented to Vitold, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, in 1429, when he was invited to join the order and authorised to admit other members. The emblem combines two symbols of the order, the fiery cross and the dead dragon.

Fabric with fiery crosses
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Sammlung für Plastik und Kunstgewerbe, 29
Gold embroidery on blue velvet, 93 x 140 cm

This woven fabric was once in the Chapel of St George in Wiener Neustadt. This provenance, like the personal device of the German king embroidered on the fabric, A.E.I.O.V with the date 1444, suggests that Frederick III inherited the fabric from Ladislas V, grandson of Sigismund.
The motto on the stem of the cross reads:
o quam misericors est deus / iustus et paciens

Drawing of the finds from Nagyvárad (Oradea), 1755
Budapest, Hungarian National Archives, Csáky family archive, P 72
Paper, ink, watercolour, 328 x 272 mm

The German title of the page refers to finds in the grave of the late princess Maria Anna during the digging of a well in the Várad fortress. Both the orb, depicted in the left of the picture, and the fragment of a crown, shown in the centre, have survived. The buckle with the enamelled, gold insignia of the Order of the Dragon, drawn on the right, is now lost.

Parts of a crown from Nagyvárad (Oradea), reconstruction
Budapest, Hungarian National Museum, 1934.415.a
Silver-gilt with cut and *repoussé* lilies, red and green stones; height: 8.3 cm; applied to a modern band.

Judging by the setting and the goldsmith techniques used, these artefacts from the Nagyvárad find of 1755 were made by goldsmiths who also worked on other votive gifts ordered by the Angevin royal court (ikon settings in Aix-la-Chapelle, Mariazell; crowns in Zadar and Belgrade; mitres in Győr, Zagreb). The crown from Zadar gives us an accurate picture of the original placement of the hinged pieces and the overall splendour of its appearance

Crown
Zadar, Stalna izložba crkvene umjetnosti
Silver-gilt, red and green stones, coloured glass, pearls; height: 8.5 cm

Parts of a crown were discovered in the reliquary shrine of St Simeon in Zadar, sewn onto the pillow underneath the head of the saint. In 1996 the original votive crown, certainly a gift of the Angevin court, was reconstructed from the surviving parts with the addition of a missing lily. On behalf of Queen consort Elizabeth, the citizens of Zadar commissioned Francesco da Milano and his assistants to make the silver shrine for the safekeeping of the relic The work was carried out between 1377 and 1380

Orb
Budapest, Hungarian National Museum, 1934.415.b
Gilt silver, height: 17.6 cm

This orb was part of the 1755 Nagyvárad find
It is difficult to determine whether the simple grave jewel corresponds to the time of death of Queen Mary in 1395 or King Sigismund in 1437

1411 After the deaths of Rupert, King of the Romans, and then of Jost, Margrave of Moravia, who was elected in opposition to him, Sigismund is elected German king at Frankfurt. He betroths his daughter, Elizabeth, to Prince Albert V of Austria. He concludes a peace treaty with Wladislaw II of Poland, and in 1412 plays host to a number of ruling princes in Buda.

1412 At Friuli, Sigismund takes over leadership of the war against Venice. After a prolonged stay in the South Tyrol, he makes a start on preparing for a council to heal the Great Schism within the Church. In 1413 he reaches agreement with Pope John XXIII at Lodi on the convocation of an ecumenical council at Constance. He then proceeds via Savoy and the Rhineland to Germany.

1414 On November 8th Sigismund is crowned German king at Aix-la-Chapelle. He spends Christmas at Constance, where he sets to work on ending the split in the Church. In 1415 the Council condemns Jan Hus to death at the stake for heresy.

1415 At Perpignan, Sigismund negotiates to obtain the resignation of Benedict XIII as pope, and later on, while at Avignon, receives news of the French defeat at Agincourt.

1416 Sigismund accepts a role as mediator in the war between France and England. At Paris, he negotiates with the luminaries of the court of Charles VI, including Duke John of Berry; after the failure of his mediation, he concludes a treaty with Henry V of England at Canterbury.

1417 The Council of Constance elects Oddo Colonna Pope. He chooses the name of Martin V.

1418 With the Council over, Sigismund sets out for Hungary via the Upper Rhineland and along the Danube, returning in 1419.

1419 King Wenceslas IV of Bohemia dies; the Hussite revolt breaks out. In Silesia, Sigismund prepares for a crusade against the Hussites, which he embarks on with the German estates.

1420 The crusaders suffer a major defeat at Vyšehrad in Prague. Sigismund succeeds in getting himself crowned king of Bohemia, and then returns to Hungary. Altogether five crusades against the Hussites end in defeat. Finding scant support and much reluctance among the German estates, Sigismund progressively withdraws from the business of the empire and does not attend the imperial Diets.

1424 Buda becomes a site of important diplomatic negotiations: Sigismund receives ambassadors from the princes of the empire, the Hussites and the Ottoman sultan, King Eric of Denmark, and John VIII Palaeologus, emperor of Byzantium. In ensuing years his attention is absorbed by defensive measures against the Turks, who are threatening Hungary's southern borders, and, in the late 1420s, the wars against the Hussites who are threatening its northern territories.

1430 Sigismund re-enters German political life at the imperial Diet in Straubing, making a start on preparations for his coronation as emperor.

1431 At Milan, Sigismund has himself crowned with the iron crown of Lombardy, then enters prolonged negotiations with Pope Eugene IV in 1432–33.

1433 As a result, on May 31st, he is crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope in Rome. For part of the same year and 1434 he attends the Council of Basle, where he reaches a negotiated compromise with the moderate Hussite faction, which had defeated the radical Taborite wing at Lipany.

1436 The 'Compacts' of Prague are signed with the Hussites.

1436 Sigismund enters Prague.

1437 Sigismund dies on December 9th at Znaim (Znojmo) in southern Bohemia.

string of southern German cities that he visited, he engaged builders. Both those in his entourage and local chroniclers relate that in Paris he likewise engaged many artisans, especially masons and goldsmiths; this has particular relevance in view of the construction work in Buda and its sculptural ornamentation, as well as for the luxury articles produced at the court. The aim in both cases was patently ostentation worthy of an emperor. It is most likely that Paris is where Arnold van Boemel from s'Hertogenbosch was active, from whom Sigismund, in Constance in 1417, commissioned—with a very precise description of his requirements—his imperial seal, clearly hoping that he would soon need it (in reality he was not able to make any use of it before his coronation in Rome in 1433).

The image and inscriptions on that seal bear witness to a serious and genuine sense of duty. The visual devices and public gestures of the exercise of power were always means to express a ruler's sense of duty and his perception of power; it seems Sigismund readily availed himself of these and had a feel for applying them in innovative ways. The insignia and reliquaries of the Holy Roman Empire had long been considered a patrimony all the way back to Charlemagne; so their transfer in 1420, at the time of his coronation, from a Prague then in revolt, to Visegrád on the Danube in Hungary after the fall of Vyšehrad, and from there to Buda in 1424, and their eventual safekeeping in Nuremberg were political gestures of this type. This gave expression to the importance of Buda as a seat, but it also expressed the German king's growing mistrust of the reigning princes of the German lands and his trust in the imperial cities at the time of the Hussite wars. Nuremberg's patriciate had proved themselves to be reliable supporters of Sigismund's economic and urban policies in Hungary from the first decade of the 15th century onwards. A pamphlet known as *Reformatio Sigismundi,* produced not long after Sigismund's death and circulated in printed form for a long time thereafter, regarded his curbs on ecclesiastical and secular princes and the greater role that he gave to the imperial cities (ideas inspired by a dream, according to the author) as being the emperor's principal legacy and the guarantee of peace in the future.

The referring of politics to a divine world order and, as it were, as the completion of salvation, were familiar themes in Sigismund's declarations. The double-headed eagle with a halo on the obverse of the imperial seal produced in 1417 was interpreted by its legend as being "the eagle of Ezekiel... sent down from heaven to the Bride, than which neither seer nor prophet soared higher"—no less than a reference to the emperor's grandiose, prophetic mission. This political program was propagated in decidedly muddled forms, ranging from eschatological religious fantasies to disquisitions on the literature of divination (including astrological and alchemical speculations imbued with symbolism) through to popular writings. A work on the symbolism of the eagle by Winand von Steeg, a German cleric who happened to visit Esztergom, or a book on the Holy Trinity by Ulmannus, a Nuremberg Franciscan friar, are examples. What is a new, modern

feature of these works is their pursuit of publicity—in marked contrast to the exclusive, select and refined culture of books at the royal and princely courts of France in this period. The popularity that was enjoyed by Ulrich Richental's richly illustrated *Chronicle of the Council of Constance* is attested by the wide distribution of the many copies of the no longer extant original. The demand was so great, in fact, that a printed edition appearing 65 years after the Council had ended still regarded it as current news. The memoirs of the Emperor's confidante, Eberhard Windecke, provide an account of Sigismund's life and deeds within the framework of what is truly a world chronicle, without the Mainz author passing up any chance to blacken the names of those countrymen whom he regarded as enemies. Although he fairly blatantly offered his services to Frederick III, who by the time that work was being written was already the new Roman king, the Habsburg ruler evidently did not consider it as being in his interest to see it acknowledged more widely how, thanks to Sigismund, the era of the house of Luxembourg was replaced by the rule of a dynasty whose device of AEIOU was supposed to assert a claim to world domination.

In any event, this mysterious Habsburg emblem (its listing of all the vowels as a symbol of completeness) is to be found, alongside the year date of 1444, embroidered among the fiery cross motifs of Sigismund's Order of the Dragon on the dark-blue cloth of a piece of fabric that is preserved in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum—at the time still undoubtedly intended as a sign of continuity. The fiery cross itself was a vehicle of regal awareness, the heavenly sign of Constantine the Great's vision (*in hoc signo vinces*—in this sign you shall conquer). This is how it came to function, on the evidence of Richental's illustrations, as a symbol of Sigismund's endeavour to unite the Church at the Council of Constance, and that is also why he bore it on his clothing when he entered Paris in 1416. A fiery cross appeared in the full symbol of the Order of the Dragon, founded by Sigismund in 1408, poised above the slain dragon that represented mankind's age-old enemy, Leviathan. It probably emerged as a symbol of the struggle against paganism at the time of the expedition that Sigismund and the crusaders of western Europe undertook against the Ottoman Turks, which led to their disastrous defeat at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396, and it gained currency in the fighting in the Balkans during the early 15th century. Sigismund may well have become acquainted with the idiom of the courtly orders of the age and their penchant for cloaking political intentions in cryptic, coded, flowery form at the time of the Nicopolis campaign that was embarked upon with the representatives of western chivalry, including Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy, who endured prolonged Turkish captivity. The members of the Order of the Dragon, as supporters of his policy in Hungary and his succession plans, were organized by Sigismund into an illustrious circle; shortly thereafter he was also conferring the honour on his allies and foreign supporters of his policies. The history of how this distinction came into being is not unlike the manner in which the art of Sigismund's court acquired its singular character. During the first two decades of his reign in Hungary, it expressed itself

as the inheritor and continuer of Angevin court culture; yet Sigismund was probably already preoccupied with ambitions to cut free, with his eyes on the kingdom of Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire, the chances for which truly blossomed after his election as German king in 1411.

In 1755, a grave was found in the courtyard of the fortress of Nagyvárad, where the nave of the Cathedral had once stood. The remains were taken to Vienna. Drawings were made of the finds, and those drawings are now in the Hungarian National Archives in Budapest. One figure shows the golden insignia of the Order of the Dragon, and on that basis it seems likely that in digging for a well the workmen had come across Sigismund's grave. At Znaim (Znojmo) in 1437, after the pacification of Prague, and sensing his impending death, Sigismund gave orders that he should be laid in state as befitted an emperor, in a deacon's vestments, wearing his insignia and seated on a throne. He was thereby expressing, through his acute sense for symbolic forms and representation, his wish to be compared with Charlemagne in death as in life. On arrival in Nagyvárad his body may already have had the Order of the Dragon insignia hanging from the neck that he had always employed on his seals alongside his official insignia as a ruler. This particular gold Order of the Dragon insignia has been lost, but still extant—and nowadays in the keeping of the Hungarian National Museum—are his silver orb and an Angevin silver crown of a type of which multiple copies may have been made at the court of Louis the Great to be used as votive crowns by members of the ruling house on their travels. The most complete of these is one that was given to adorn the relics of St Simeon in Zara (Zadar); perhaps a silver crown like this was also donated to Nagyvárad for the reliquary of St Ladislas. It seems improbable that objects from Sigismund's grave alone would have been unearthed in the Nagyvárad find without the grave of his first wife, Queen Mary, who had been buried at the same spot in 1395, also being exposed. If that was indeed the case, then the crown may have been part of Queen Mary's burial jewellery. If, however, it too came from Sigismund's grave and did indeed originate from the reliquary of St Ladislas, that would indicate that Sigismund had himself buried wearing an emblem of the person who was his ideal as knight and ruler, at the same time taking to the grave the evidence of an oath taken on the St Ladislas reliquary by the last conspirators to threaten his throne.

This too is one of the many narratives of which a number of conceivable versions may exist, not one of which can be proved. This is why it is such an enjoyable intellectual adventure to take a glimpse into the Sigismund age, when forms always carried a meaning, and every object and every creature pointed to something else beyond itself. This is what Erwin Panofsky, that great connoisseur of the art of those times, called disguised symbolism. This is the point where we land on the territory of the 15th century's universal art history—a territory that at the time did not yet count as "abroad". ❧

Zoltán Halasi

Poems

Translated by David Hill

The One That ...

Az, aki

You sell newspapers: I'm your latest story.
You are a waitress: I'm the wine you carry.
I am the running road you drive your car on,
the beach on which you lie when on vacation.

I'm there when you're at home, musing on nothing.
I am the pavement where you put out junk, once monthly.
I am that street corner, which each day finds you turning,
the tram station to which, with bag on back, you hurry.

When you hold your head high, and when you sink it,
when your eyes flash at me, when they stare down,
when you shout it out, when you keep it secret,
it's just the deviations of an indivisible one.
You are the one that I am, in each minute,
not alienated from itself right now.

Zoltán Halasi

studied Hungarian and History at the University of Szeged, and worked for two years as a language teacher in a secondary school. He is a poet, translator and essayist. His first collection of poems appeared in1997; the poems above are from his second, published in 2005.

Smile

Mosoly

What could it be about my smile?
I wonder, looking at you,
melting before you all the while.

A stupid question, in the first place:
is it a material thing? The muscles
creating pleasure on the face?

Is it the way the thought of you has such power
it contracts the crows' feet round my eyes
from fans to sprigs of flowers?

Do you like my smiling mouth's crevasse,
and how it makes my cheeks
bunch in a bun-shaped mass?

Or how my moustache's curtain
sweeps free of my teeth (still real)
above the gums' pink ribbon?

The way my eyes, rather than widen,
get tighter, my cow-like lashes
making them still more hidden?

Do you spy a pleasant heat-dispersion
across my pale freckled skin,
or enjoy my general lack of aggression?

Or something behind all this? A midget-sized
power supply, hidden back there?
Can you see I'm in working order through my eyes?

Or, darling, is it that my smile reflects how you—
before you've even done it—will get
embarrassed by it; then start smiling too?

Feeble

A satnya

According to Herodotus,
the name of Cheops, who had the pyramid built,
was, for generations,
not uttered by the supposedly
grateful Egyptians.
The people of Rabbah,
the rebellious Ammonite city,
were, on King David's command,
sawn up alive,
and their remains
tossed into brick-driers.
Ptolemy Euerghetes, known as the Benefactor,
had his own son torn limb from limb
and sent to his sister-wife
for dinner.
Jafar, the court jester,
got his tongue cut out
through a slicing of the larynx
at the hands of the enlightened vizier's son.

And the century that has just ended
(the century of the child,
as zealous idealists imagined it)
towers over all its predecessors
with its piles of corpses.

What could there be to reflect on?

Ever since Homo sapiens conquered
his own nature from nature,
he has not known what to do with it.
Though ruled over by his servant,
he plays at magnificence.

More fun than mummies and daddies, shopkeepers, doctors!

The carpet of organisation woven beneath his backside,
he tries out his instruments of torture,
munching the bananas of conviction,

making his little companions eat his shit,
and concealing with a Down's syndrome smile
his indescribable joy:

"I'm the king,

feeble old me."

Evil Angel

Angelus Malus

"I was a pretty girl, desirable, curvaceous,
extremely short-sighted,
alarmed easily,
stiff as if armour-plated.
Then onto me a mournful, graceless
unknown boy alighted.
He didn't know how to loosen me,
how male and female interrelated.
He didn't look in my direction, but at his slowly growing erection.

He got erect, and mournfully and wanly
his ten fingers harrassed me.
A blind lightning flashed,
I was engulfed by cloud.
I had become an annexed territory, occupied thinly.
A stranger had possessed me,
made me his patch,
somehow insolently proud:
like fallen snow gone black with soot; like the conqueror's foot."

The Leader's Moment

(the political advisor speaks)

A vezérperc

(a politikai tanácsadó súg)

"... Become the one originating things:
your own stunt double. Undertake the assault.
Fail; sacrifice your blood for the time being.
Don't show your teeth. Keep their gold in a vault.

Wear suits from England. Get your hair well pruned.
Speak languages: multi-Chinese each one.
Tomorrow, shun those who today shake your hand:
ready to turn your back on anyone.

As long as you've a goal in mind, you'll reach it
even by fishing in a dried-up lake.
Some tricky soccer footwork, some gestures in your speeches,
a few prize women in the conference break—

meanwhile, observe how ebb is overwhelmed by flow,
the people's fear of blood is vanquished by their hunger for it;
think of the nation, its elite lost through the domino
principle, falling into your lap. And then you bow before it ..."

Two Unlikelies

A két valószerűtlen

Escaping?
For one thing, it was minus fifty out there.
Then, even if your nose didn't fall off whole,
tigers would rip you into pieces.
Or if you avoided the stripey peril,
the local peasants would definitely turn you in.
Escaping?

In every hundred, ninety-seven perished from the labour.

After a while the Serbs were let out, then the Hungarians.
He, a Pole,
was released
in fifty-nine. One of the last ones.

He's saying all this in casually fluent Russian,
with a face that shows no imprint
of either the twenty years dragged out in the goldmine
or the lack of the same period of proper life.

Stamina, he explains. At forty
he started over, back home, as a stonemason.
Built himself a house, too, in ten years.
Now fifty-seven, travelling for the first time.

And me, I'm just hitchhiking up Hungary's familiar E5—
Kistelek, Félegyháza, Kecskemét, Lajosmizse—
from unleavable Szeged
to unreachable Budapest, between not being and being.
More on the road than under roof,
the burden of myself making me stagger.

He's Stanisław Kamiński. From Toruń. Born in Bydgoszcz.
As a freshman, the Soviets took him off for "two days"
of work. September of thirty-nine.

Did I read Solzhenitsyn?
He's got a diary, too. I could visit and he'll show me.

Sitting in the imperial language,
in a soft space capsule, an alien womb,
we're cosmic travellers, weightless already.
The two unlikelies (his story,
my hearing it) melt into one
in the bramble taste of Russian words.

He hums some song from the camps, winks
in the rear-view mirror (he's a rogue all right).

Would I like some halva, his young girlfriend asks.

Miklós Zeidler

English Influences on Modern Sport in Hungary

Part 2

Miksa Esterházy and the introduction of athletics

What István Széchenyi was to horse racing in Hungary, Count Miksa Esterházy was to the early days of athletics: a founding father, financial sponsor, theorist and publicist, an organiser—and sportsman who led by personal example. When he was a young man, Esterházy had been a diplomat in the Austro-Hungarian service in Paris, London and the United States; at the latter two postings he became devoted to sport. Back home, his enthusiasm, his informality, his particular aristocratic egalitarianism and his authentic fair play spirit infected the supporters he had quickly won to his side.[1]

On 22 April 1874, Esterházy started a series of articles under the heading "Athletics" in the hunting and racing paper *Vadász- és Versenylap.* His by-line for these articles was the eloquent pseudonym "Viator"—wayfarer—which was intended as a reference both to his globe-trotting past and to the term "pedestrians" (i.e. walkers) that the English had used for professional athletes during the early part of the 19th century. In 17 articles published over a seven-month period, he wrote about various "popular" forms of physical exercise, i.e., accessible to a wide public. As he wrote in the very first of these:

> Undeniably, certain "sports" in our country enjoy a high level of participation—though, alas, only those branches of sport whose doors are open pre-eminently to the upper—or, more accurately, wealthier—classes [...] Everybody knows that racing, the chase,

1 ■ He founded a sports club on his estates, near the town of Tata, for artisans working on the estate, where masters and apprentices could indulge in the pleasures of playing *méta*, a traditional Hungarian ball game that somewhat resembles baseball. See László Siklóssy: "Magyar pantheon 2. Esterházy Miksa gróf [Hungarian Pantheon 2. Count M. E.]," *Testnevelés* 1930 (vol. 3, no. 2): p. 90.

Miklós Zeidler
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coursing, stalking and bear-hunting, for one thing, are hugely expensive and, for another, tacitly presume the ownership of large estates.

These recreations, therefore, were merely "aristocratic passions", which "lend sport an appearance of not being for the people." That is damaging, however, for "'exclusive' [sic!] sport and 'popular' sport [...] are brothers." Gymnastics, introduced in Hungary in emulation of Prussia, was only made compulsory in academic secondary schools; riding, on the other hand, was costly. Consequently, the wider public was excluded from regular physical exercise:

> What is left is the *coffee-house* and politics, or at best what is left, with regard to our university youth, are the innocent, albeit sometimes rowdy protests provoked by the 'sport' of torchlight processions and suchlike demonstrations; but then, that is again succeeded by the coffee-house, billiards, the ale house, and we can only thank heavens if we are not subjected, in line with other Parisian innovations, to the tipsy horrors of 'absynthe', the corrupter and curse of French youth, poisoner of its manhood.

To counter these temptations, and with both moral and national educational intentions, Esterházy set out his program for popularising athletics:

> Here, in Hungary, we have to raise 'athleticism' (my apologies for the long word), have to raise muscularity to a *national religion,* raising altars to it in our schools, in our academies, among more mature men, in the temple of our national institutions. Such a glorification of muscularity does not mean roguery; does not mean crude outbursts of raw strength at the expense of intellectual vigour; that trusty old adage *'mens sana in corpore sano'* still stands true. *For* one another, not *against* one another.

And, with a reference to the dimensions that he was hoping for the movement, he added: "Let us start at the bottom, start early, and let us make athletics training widely popular."[2]

A fortnight later came a philippic against "our physical apathy". "The 'Hungarian belly' is a truly national 'speciality'," he mocked, and yet it was not the case that Hungarians lacked a talent for sport: "If [a Hungarian] sets about a given physical discipline with heart and soul, whether it be riding, fencing, horse racing or pistol shooting, he will soon take it to a degree of perfection that is not to be sniffed at."[3] Competition was capable of whetting in the lazy population an appetite to set off on the road to splendid results, a thought he developed this thought three weeks later: "'Competition' is a true magic wand that is capable of producing an invigorating spark in even an apathetic lump of wood. Competition is the 'motor' of all healthy public business." What, after all, were the turf, school, commerce, literary careers, the elections of parliamentary representatives, the

2 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. I.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 22 April (vol. 18, no. 16): pp. 113–114.

3 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. II ," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 6 May (vol. 18, no. 18): p. 130.

contest between a pack of hounds and a fox, but competition? The ancient Greeks and the participants in medieval tournaments had also competed. "We only wish to occupy ourselves with *unarmed* athletic sports," Esterházy pointed out, "where the flannel shirt and light footwear rule in place of iron and steel."[4]

The next installment surveyed the various events that were considered to fall within the purview of athletics:

> What makes up the programme at an athletics contest? In the stricter sense: 1) walking races; 2) running races; 3) steeple chasing; 4) pole vaulting; 5) throwing events; 6) high jump; 7) boxing; 8) swimming; and 9) the type of fencing that is known as *'assaut d'armes'*. This last, being an armed form of physical exercise, will only be mentioned by the by in these lines.[5]

He highlighted the importance of boxing, which he personally considered a sine qua non of both athletics and gymnastics, providing a short summary of its rules and history. He also wrote about English cricket and American baseball, which he felt—given that they were ball games which had value as physical exercise and were played within a framework of rules—would be an easier way of accustoming schoolboys to sport than formal and compulsory gymnastics.

He went on, in no less than five articles, to familiarise readers with the ins and outs of organising competitions, from the correct preparations of the ground, to endorsing efforts to ensure that there was a "fair pair of hands" to bestow prizes on the champions at the end of a contest. He gave an account of serious and mock swimming competitions and also the hare and hounds' paperchases that were then in vogue in Britain. He also cast an affectionate smile on the prizes being offered at an athletics meeting in a small town:

> 1 Gladstone bag, 1 meerschaum pipe, 1 cricket ball, 1 ditto bat, 1 pair ditto boots, 1 photo album, 1 hunting knife, 1 inkstand, 1 brooch, 1 cigar holder, 1 tobacco pouch, 100 cigars, 2 teacups, 1 golden pencil, 1 set of cufflinks, 1 pair of hairbrushes, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*![6]

In the same article, he also provided a basic guide for future athletes on the sportsmanlike approach to competition: "They should have a desire for glory without false shame. They should want to win and outdo their competitors, but not be ashamed of losing. In athletics it is just as noble to lose as to win."[7]

Esterházy stated that the spread of athletics in Great Britain had needed no more than two or three decades, and that crucial role had been played by club

4 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. V.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 28 May (vol. 18, no. 21): p. 150.
5 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. VI.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 10 June (vol. 18, no. 23): p. 165.
6 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. XII.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 26 August (vol. 18, no. 35): p. 241.
7 ■ Ibid., p. 241.

competitions. (By then 226 permanent athletics clubs were in operation, fully one third of them in and around London). Hungary, too, therefore needed a "focal point", a "banner", an athletics organisation around which young people might gather:

> if there were a centre, an association, a club (either in the capital or in a substantial provincial city), there would be the starting-point for introducing the spirit of athletics in our Hungarian homeland. Let us unite, then—and get to work! [...] So, let us form athletics associations as the alpha and omega of the spirit of athletics.[8]

The culmination of this train of thought came with an article on 28 October, in which he set out the tasks of such a future association: the organisation of contests, the distribution of prizes, broadening the compass of gymnastics, the introduction of boxing, the organisation of athletics for adults and students, and the sponsorship of student races (e.g., by giving prizes). At the same time, he let it be known that "the 'London Athletics Club' has already, with the most courteous alacrity, promised its co-operation to a future 'Hungarian Athletics Association', and will extend a friendly hand of greeting to our country's first club."[9]

As the articles appeared, a growing band of people began to form an interest in social sport. Esterházy generally sought to make contact with prospective athletics enthusiasts. In the autumn of 1874, he gave a talk to a reading circle at the University of Budapest about his sporting experience and took the opportunity to announce the foundation of the Magyar Athletikai Club; on 9 November, he held a meeting at the National Riding School. Lajos Molnár, a law student, attended as a correspondent for the *Reform* newspaper. He immediately lent his support and was to become the count's right-hand man, confidant and, in time, a member of the MAC's governing body.[10] Molnár, who did not have a sportsman's build—indeed was rather puny by constitution—placed himself at Esterházy's disposal while he was at university and even for a time when he worked as a civil servant in local finances. The main fruit of their joint efforts was to lay the basis for organising and publishing material on athletics in Hungary. After the final piece in Esterházy's series appeared on 18 November, the baton was passed to Molnár, who went on to flood the daily press with popularising articles and lectures on outdoor sports in the capital and the provinces. Esterházy meanwhile tried to drum up support in more élite circles.

It was a sign of their success that members of the nascent club virtually besieged the National Riding School when it reopened its doors on 15 March

8 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. XIV.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 7 October (vol. 18, no. 41): p. 284.

9 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: "Athletika. XV.," *Vadász- és Versenylap* 1874, 28 October (vol. 18, no. 45): p. 306.

10 ■ Ferenc Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története 1875–1925.* [History of the MAC 1875–1925]. Budapest, 1925, p. 8; László Siklóssy: "Magyar pantheon. Molnár Lajos sportíró élete és művei [Hungarian Pantheon. The life and works of sports journalist L. M.]," *Testnevelés* 1931 (vol. 4, no. 2): pp. 99–101.

1875.[11] The youngsters came to an amicable agreement on a way and a timetable for sharing the premises: the arena on the ground floor and the smaller hall on the first floor were to be given over to gymnasts and fencers for 3 days, then to the "pedestrians" (walkers, runners, jumpers) and boxers for the next 3 days. The MAC (Hungarian Athletic Club) used the same venue to hold its inaugural meeting on 8 April, with close to 300 members in attendance. Though the presence of the

Participants of the MAC's competition of 6 May 1875.
From: A Magyar Athletikai Club története 1875–1925. *(History of the MAC 1875–1925) by Ferenc Zuber, Budapest, 1925.*

aristocrats was considerable, they were by no means dominant. Naturally, Esterházy was elected president, but even though almost one in two of the founding members who paid the largest membership fees were from the upper classes, they only made up one quarter of the club's steering committee.[12] The overwhelming majority of ordinary members—those who actually played sports, but paid only the minimum annual membership—were from the traditional middle classes. Even in later years, the MAC did not become any more inclusive than this; up until the Second World War, indeed, it was an unwritten rule that admission to the club was granted only to applicants who were Christian and possessed a school-leaving certificate. Most of them were of middle- and upper-class background.

11 ■ The building, which used to stand behind the National Museum in Pest, not only served as a riding school, as its large covered hall offered possibilities for training in many sports. The opening of the National Riding School in 1857 was, in practice, the realisation of plans that Széchenyi and his associates had first mooted two decades earlier.
12 ■ Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története,* pp. 9 & 14.

The MAC held its first public athletics meet in the presence of many dignitaries on 6 May 1875, between 3.30 and 5.30 p.m., in the courtyard of the Neugebäude, the huge barracks demolished at the end of the 19th century, which Joseph II had built close to what became the site of the Parliament building. The events were run in the following order: 100 yards sprint (heats), shot put, boxing (elimination bouts), 120 yards hurdles (heats), 100 yards sprint (final), long jump, 2 miles run, high jump, 120 yards hurdles (final), boxing (final). As the extant photograph shows, the strip of these early athletes consisted of either street shoes or gym shoes, long-legged white ducks, long-sleeved, high-necked flannel Garibaldi shirt, a gymnast's belt and sash, along with a cap.[13] That same year, the MAC worked out rules and regulations for its competitions in eight sports (gymnastics on apparatus, walking, boxing, fencing, throwing, wrestling, ball games, swimming) and thereby tried to keep its members informed about new types of physical exercise and, indirectly, to put in a claim to govern these sports.[14]

This was a significant stage in an increasingly acrimonious dispute that was developing between the bodies to which gymnasts and athletes belonged, and which the respective associations that organised championships were to wage bitterly at the beginning of the twentieth century. Advocates of athletics argued that "With gymnasts, moving mechanically as they do and unfamiliar with the fire of competition as they are, individuality is relegated to the background." In the eyes of gymnasts, by contrast, athletics was nothing more than

> an unhealthy outgrowth of rational gymnastics [...] which is based on human vanity and weakness [...] which is just as much a threat to genuinely instructive gymnastics as when the barbaric boxing contests of the pancratists ousted the pentathlon among the Greeks of old.[15]

At the back of this was a degree of social and ethnic antagonism, insofar as the early devotees of gymnastics were drawn in conspicuously high number from the urban bourgeoisie of German stock, whereas the hugely ambitious MAC recruited members from more distinguished circles.[16]

13 ■ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–14; Lajos Molnár: *Athletika.* Budapest: Fekete Bernát, 1875, pp. 144–149. Boxing, which at that time was still closer to what was called "the noble art of self-defence", likewise has Esterházy to thank for its introduction to Hungary and was the sport that he cultivated the most outside athletics. He would occasionally join in sparring sessions, and there is one recorded instance where this had a peculiar outcome: the count managed to land a blow on the nose of a certain Ernő Porzsolt, who took it to be an affront and challenged Esterházy under the duelling code (see Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története*, p. 14).

14 ■ Molnár: *Athletika*, pp. 176–183.

15 ■ *Ibid.*, p. 130; Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története*, p. 61.

16 ■ There was another standpoint from which the pride of place that gymnastics attained early on could be seen as coming under threat from the verve of the emerging athletics movement, along with the eminence of the personalities who were backing it. Physical education in schools at the time was, by and large, restricted to gymnastics, and training of gym teachers was in the hands of the Nemzeti Torna Egylet (National Gymnastics Association); however, Esterházy, as has been seen, was advocating major changes for physical education in schools, urging that gymnastics be given lesser importance.

Nationwide propagandising started almost as soon as the club was founded. In that first season of competition, long-distance rowing was staged on the Danube, from Budapest to Komárom; long-distance race walking also started with the 85-mile Budapest–Székesfehérvár–Balatonfüred race of 23–25 July, in which at the starting line—in accordance with the customs of "bona fide walking"—the entrants pledged their word with a handshake as their guarantee that they would not infringe the rules. One of the competitors had himself transported by cart for part of the way, and was therefore disqualified; he was also expelled by the MAC, and the decision to do so was published in both the domestic and foreign press. Lajos Porzsolt, the winner, was welcomed in Balatonfüred with the sounds of the Rákóczi March and mortar rounds, a triumphal arch and a welcoming speech. That evening the theatre put on a gala performance, and a banquet for 300 was held in his honour. A year later, an ovation, gun salute and laurel wreath greeted István Bendik on his victory in an 81-mile walking race on the Budapest–Hatvan–Parádfürdő route. Recognising the propaganda value of the extraordinary interest that was shown in long-distance races (swimming, walking and, later on, cycling), Esterházy conceived a plan for a demonstration collective walk by MAC members in the autumn of 1880, all the way from Balatonfüred via Klagenfurt and Trieste to Fiume. That plan was eventually dropped, but on 7 August 1881, at the Chain Bridge in Budapest, a club delegation ceremonially welcomed fellow member Iván Zmertych on his completing the 1,530-km (956-mile) walk from Paris to Budapest in four weeks.[17]

From the 1880s on, it was the distance swimmers on the Balaton who came to the fore. Kálmán Szekrényessy swam across the lake covering the distance from Siófok to Balatonfüred in 6 hours 45 minutes on 29 August 1880. Later on, he willingly pitted his strength against foreigners, though he generally lost those contests. Another interesting club initiative was an obstacle swimming race that was staged at Balatonfüred in the summer of 1884.[18] As the 1870s turned into the 1880s, there was a growing interest in athletics, with local clubs springing up in the bigger cities, including Kolozsvár, Debrecen, Győr, Sopron, Székesfehérvár and Pécs, no doubt assisted by a pamphlet entitled *Útmutató athletikai klubok alakítására* (Guidance for the Formation of Athletics Clubs) that the MAC published in 1876.

All the while, Esterházy and Molnár continued to popularise athletics through their writings. Already back in 1875, a *Gyalogolási kalauz* (A Guide to Pedestrianism) appeared in print by Viator, part an explanatory dictionary under 102 headings and part a guide on organising races and suitable clothing. It is here that the first "official" definition of athletics is to be found: "'Pedestrianism': the kinds of athletic events comprising race walking, running, jumping, hurdles and obstacle races, and throwing."[19]

17 ■ Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története,* pp. 15–16, 21 & 31.
18 ■ *Ibid.,* pp. 30–31 & 40.
19 ■ Viator [Count Miksa Esterházy]: *Gyalogolási kalauz. Röviden szótár alakjában összeállította Viator* [A Guide to Pedestrianism. Assembled in the form of a concise dictionary by V.]. Budapest: Eggenberger, 1875, p. 6.

A good deal more ambitious was the volume *Athletika,* likewise published in 1875, in which Molnár, who dedicated the work to Esterházy and indeed drew extensively on his mentor's thinking and even his texts, gave a detailed presentation of what had led up to the movement's establishment, its goals, its achievements and its present situation.[20] The author was clearly preoccupied at the time with aspects of the natural philosophy and, to use a modern term, historical sociology of his subject, as it is precisely with passages with those flavours that he goes well beyond the contents of Esterházy's newspaper articles of the previous year. The "Introduction", for which Molnár chose a quotation from Darwin as the epigraph, is a veritable philosophical mini-disquisition on the struggle for life; whereas the chapter headed "Athletics" is a lyrical hymn of praise to the creative striving for the beautiful, the good and the perfect. Molnár goes on to ruminate about national character, painting a somewhat idealised picture of the English and managing to be quite scathing about other nations. In his view, England and the English were characterised by "financial and intellectual greatness", physical strength and skill, a large capacity for work, wholesomeness of character, "quiet manliness", cool-headedness, pluckiness, resolve, progressive attitudes, "easy-going freedom", honesty, love of family, profound intelligence and civility—all attributes that the author would have been more than happy to discern in his fellow countrymen. Molnár was a good deal less charitable in his scoring for other European nations. Admittedly, the French, he suggested, were strong, tenacious, flexible, polite and honest, but "happy-go-lucky, hot-blooded, sarcastic". Germans might not be happy-go-lucky, it was true, but they were "pensive, phlegmatic by temperament", slow, servile, coarse, immoderate, boastful and pushy, whereas Italians were fanciful, hedonistic, passionate, empty-headed, vain and lavish, Russians were downright liars and drunks, and Spaniards were haughty, obstinate, extravagant, lazy, dreamy, capricious and presumptuous.[21]

Molnár was of the opinion that the introduction of the British educational system, with its provision for physical exercise, and of athletics could only redound to the good of all "developing" nations, and hence the Hungarians, too. It should be all the easier for a Hungarian to adopt the correct example, since "he is born to be a *victorious, virile, self-confident and assertive* person":

> The Hungarian physique is supremely fitted for training and improvement, being big-boned, strong but lithe. The dominant trait in our nation is virile and dignified; seriousness and good humour are basic traits among Hungarians.

Equally, the Hungarian's "sanguine temperament" demanded regular physical exercise, because in its absence "this sanguineousness can carry him into excess in so many ways."[22]

20 ■ Molnár: *Athletika*, 1875.
21 ■ Ibid., pp. 63-67.
22 ■ Ibid., p. 73.

The book understood athletics in the widest possible sense to mean virtually any form of physical exercise, including, besides running, jumping and throwing events, gymnastics on apparatus, boxing, wrestling, certain indigenous ball games *(méta, róta),* swimming, skating and rowing. Fencing, being an armed sport, could not, in Molnár's view, be considered as belonging strictly to the scope of athletics; but since "it acts so beneficially on the development of a sense of manhood and chivalry", he drew the attention of clubs to its benefits as well.[23]

Molnár saw the book as a declaration of war against lethargy and idle pleasures. He wished to release slothful young men from their slavery to pontoon and poker, absinthe and skirts, to animate a social life that had been corrupted by "blasé" and "debauched" failures. He wished to point out the path of useful action to the "tumultuous crowd", which "demonstrates turbulently and clamours vociferously" in its hunger for big ideas, yet in truth is taken in by mere empty phrases. He wished to stir up the "melancholy host" that partakes solely of intellectual nourishment, the "flabby-thinking", disenchanted, enervated, querulous young men who were "victims of their overheated emotional and intellectual exertions".[24] He was convinced that the pursuit of athletics would help get rid of these pathological symptoms and also contribute to modern nation-building:

> Fresh blood will course in the veins of Hungary's youth; *lively minds* and *alert senses* will lead them in their decisions; *true fire* and *noble ardour* will animate their young lives; and their *sinewy arms and trained minds* will be able to perform mighty services for the country![25]

He considered it would be a worthy tribute to the success of the movement if, in 1888, they could celebrate the millennium of the foundation of the Hungarian state with a large-scale competition:

> One of the highpoints of celebrations on this highly significant day might be formed by grand national games, a national athletics contest in which champion athletes, assembled from all corners of the country, were able to strive and compete with one another on the Rákos Field, inseparable as it is from Hungary's history. May it be so![26]

In 1879, Molnár published another book—with the title *Athletikai gyakorlatok* (Athletic Exercises)—and including several of Esterházy's earlier writings as well as his own. This was a popularising work that not only surveyed a wide range of

23 ■ Ibid., p. 80.
24 ■ Ibid., pp. 113–117.
25 ■ Ibid., p. 119.
26 ■ Ibid., p. 139. That was not quite how it happened in the end, not least because, after several changes in timing, the millennial celebrations were finally held in 1896, and the open-air sports competitions were not held on the former site of the country's Diets, the plain by the Danube at Pest, but on a temporary track constructed next to the Horse-Racing Course (neighbouring today's Puskás Ferenc Stadium) near City Park. The Millennial Racing Track, as it was known and which still stands to the present day, became the cradle of football and track cycle racing at the turn of the century.

sports and children's games, gave accounts of sensational sporting achievements (e.g., the six-day walking contest that the American Edward Peyson Weston and the Irish immigrant Daniel O'Leary staged in April 1877, or the feats of Captain Matthew Webb and the Australian Frederick Cavill in swimming the English Channel in 1875 and August 1877, respectively), but also passed on training plans and contained superb illustrations. It was the first work in Hungary to give a knowledgeable description of association football.[27]

Ball games were the subject of a booklet that was written by Lajos Porzsolt, one of the MAC's athletes. This book of Hungarian ball games *(A Magyar labdajátékok könyve)* came into being through encouragement offered by Esterházy, who in 1877 held a competition to find a writer for a history of the subject. Though publication was greatly delayed, the descriptions of over thirty Hungarian throwing and catching games given by this indispensable work fitted in closely with the efforts that the MAC was making at the time to create a basis for the spread of ball sports by reviving old games, in the process ensuring that athletics had a controlling role.

The enthusiasm suggested by these writings soon fizzled out in MAC circles. Due to a shortage of money, the club's autumn meeting, announced for 17 October 1875, had to be cancelled; and although it was held in November, attendance at training sessions fell off. For the spring meeting the next year, the club organised a special horse-drawn tram service to transport spectators in a carriage (bearing an "Athletics Context" destination board) to the Orczy Gardens in the Józsefváros district. Despite that, levels of interest and participation remained modest, perhaps partly because the date in question—30 April 1876—also happened to be that of the ceremonial opening of Margaret Bridge. The club management tried to ginger up the flagging movement during the winter months, which were anyway the off-season for sporting activity, by arranging Athletics Balls, though these met with little success. Members

Count Jenő Kinsky high-jumping.
From: Száz év atlétika *(One Hundred Years of Athletics) by Ferenc Krasovec*
Budapest, Magyar Atlétikai Szövetség, 1997.

27 ■ Lajos Molnár (ed.): *Athletikai gyakorlatok. Gr. Esterházy Miksa (Viator) czikkeivel bővítve* [Athletic Exercises, Supplemented with Articles by Count M. E. (Viator)]. Budapest: 1879.

were constantly in arrears with paying their fees and produced mediocre competition results; many, in fact, resigned. In 1883, a whole group left the MAC in order to join the Hunnia Boating Club, which had been formed the previous year.[28] The club was undoubtedly impeded in its efforts by the fact that, in the absence of its own facilities, for a quarter of a century it could only hold training sessions and meets at grounds belonging to other organisations, either at the National Riding School or in the Orczy Gardens. Although Esterházy had expressed a hope in 1874 that the establishment of the first athletics clubs would be followed by the construction of a permanent running track, the MAC only built its own ground, on Margaret Island, in 1901.

By then, Miksa Esterházy was no longer alive, having died in 1883 at the age of 46. Direction of the Magyar Athletikai Club was passed on to relatives, with Miksa being succeeded as president first by Mihály, then Andor of the same family. The club meanwhile sank into crisis, though Hungarian athletics did not suffer greatly on that account, as new sports clubs were founded. The counts did not leave much of a legacy of personal mementoes that relate directly to athletics. The most valuable, though, is undoubtedly a snapshot in which Mihály Esterházy caught the high-jump "wonder" Count Jenő Kinsky—"Nusi" as he was popularly known—in an impromptu jump.

The triumphal march of football

Two stories have gained currency about the introduction of football in Hungary. One of these is found in the memoirs of swimmer Alfréd Hajós (gold medallist in the 100 meter and 1,200 meter freestyle at the Athens Olympics in 1896). In this version, the first football was brought to Hungary by Ferenc Ray, an engineering student in Zurich, when he came home for the Christmas holidays in 1896. At the request of Ferenc Stobbe, one of his father's colleagues, he dropped in one evening on the Budapest Gymnastics Club (BTC) in Markó Street, not far from the Parliament building, when they happened to be holding a training session:

> In a disciplined fashion, gymnasts, wrestlers and boxers were diligently performing their prescribed exercises. All at once, Ferenc Stobbe appeared in the doorway with his young friend, who without further ado—with no prior announcement—tossed in a football among them. All at once, the discipline and order broke down; everybody was trying to snatch the ball for himself. In the process, the ball dropped onto the floor, at which point the players instinctively passed it on with their feet. *That was how Hungarian football was born on the evening of 18 December 1896.* The new game became popular in no time at all, yet bit by bit, the kicking and scrimmaging started to attain such dimensions that several of the gymnasium's windows and lights fell to the ground with great crashes. Only a strident yell of "Stop!" from Károly Iszer, the club's manager, cut short the kick-about, which by then had degenerated to brawling. He then ordered the

28 ■ Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története,* pp. 20–21. The "Huns", as the club's members were nicknamed, became notorious by the end of the century as Budapest's wildest sportsmen.

panting players to sit, and Ferenc Ray gave them a talk about the popularity of football abroad, the game's points of interest and beauties, and finished by acquainting them with the rules of the game.[29]

The other version speaks of a Károly Löwenrosen (Lányi), a carpenter, who returned from the United States in 1895, bringing two footballs with him. Löwenrosen put together a football team from the members of a railway workers' male choir, then after three months of training, set up a match for them. As recorded by Löwenrosen himself, later universally known as "Csarli" (Charlie) by those who worked in the factories and attended the grounds around Hungária Boulevard:

> We put a strip together by cutting down the legs of long johns and blue factory overalls and patching our boots. On the day of the match, however, we had terrible luck, because by the morning of 1 November 1896, 25 cm [10 inches] of snow had fallen. Given that, we were very surprised that some 300 spectators were still curious about the game. The players were loath to undress, but after much persuasion they were finally ready to play in overcoats and boots [...] The big match lasted just 20 minutes, because in that time three ankles were fractured and further play had to be abandoned. I was ostracised by all the wives [...] and for six months could not show myself among them because I was a murderer in their eyes.[30]

It is likely, though, that neither the self-oblivious kick-around by those at the BTC, nor the "battle in the snow" waged close to the present MTK ground, was the first *appearance* of football in Hungary. As I have already noted, in 1879, Lajos Molnár's book on athletic exercises presented football; in 1886, Kornél Szokolay published two small articles in the *Képes Sport-naptár* (Illustrated Sporting Calendar) and in a sports weekly entitled *Herkules.* They may have contained a few inaccuracies but they still provided fairly detailed descriptions of the game. From the early 1890s, the magazine *Sport-Világ* (Sports World) began to carry news about football matches abroad, and from 1895 it was explicitly advocating the game.[31] *Salon és Sport* was even faster off the mark, for it had already put out an illustrated description of the game in its December 1891 issue. In 1896, a booklet, *Az angol rugósdi* (English Football), was published, written by Mihály Bély, trainer for the Budapest Gymnastics Club (Budapesti [Budai] Torna Egylet, BTE), though it appears to be about rugby rather than association football. There are also bits

29 ■ Alfréd Hajós: *Így lettem olimpiai bajnok* [How I Became an Olympic Champion]. Budapest: Sport, 1956, pp. 84-85. The BTC's own 40th anniversary publication dates the event to 26 November 1896: see *A Budapesti Torna Club 40 éves története* [The 40-year history of the Budapest Gymnastics Club]. Budapest: Ifj. Kellner Ernő, 1925, p. 8.

30 ■ János Földessy: *A magyar labdarúgás és a 60 éves MLSz* [Hungarian Football and the Hungarian Football Association at 60 years]. Budapest: Sport, 1960, p. 9.

31 ■ György Palfy (ed.): *A sport enciklopédiája. A testnevelés és testgyakorlás kézikönyve* [Sports Encyclopaedia: Handbook of Physical Education and Physical Exercise]. Budapest: Enciklopédia, 1928, vol. 2, p. 146.

of data to suggest that football was already being played in Budapest secondary schools—or to be more specific, variants of it that no doubt also differed from one another—in the early 1890s. At all events, it is a documented fact that the Szabadtéri Játszó Társaság (Outdoor Games Society), run by pupils at the Calvinist grammar school in Lónyay Street, changed its name in 1889 to the Junior Football Game Association (Ifjúsági Labdarúgó-játék Egyesület), and the 1891–92 annual bulletin of the Catholic grammar school in Ilona Street mentions something called "foot- and fist-ball" as being one of the pupils' favourite pastimes. The man plainly responsible for the latter was the school's English teacher, Arthur Yolland, who was to play a key role in Hungarian football at a later date. At the state grammar school in Barcsay Street, football cropped up in the academic year 1893–94 on the initiative of the gymnastics master, Ferenc Collaud, and József Ottó introduced it at the Catholic grammar school in Markó Street in 1895.[32] Indeed, the "presentation of the game of football" figured on the program of the MAC Winter fixture held on 8 December 1895.[33]

Notwithstanding these sundry starting-points, football owed its early popularity largely to its being taken up by the BTC, already a highly prestigious club, with three of its members participants at the 1896 Olympics. The turn of the century in Hungary was still an era of all-round sportsmen, who took pleasure in cultivating quite disparate sports (cycling, tests of strength, events calling for speed and agility, and sometimes ball games), in some cases even becoming champions in them. It is not surprising that sportsmen like them, ever on the search for the new, should see both a challenge and competitive potential in football. They soon took to this new, and initially quite ferocious, game; and news quickly spread that the MAC, the Ludovika Military Academy, the Hungarian Swimming Club (Magyar Úszó Egylet, MÚE) and BTC were all planning football teams. The BTC arranged their first open-air training session, on 8 February 1897, at the Millennial Racetrack alongside the new Horse Racing Course. (Though it was to be demolished when the outdoor season ended in the previous year, sports clubs managed to save it by appealing to the metropolitan authorities, who, after admitting that there was no other racing facility of comparable quality in the city, permitted it to continue.[35]) Károly Iszer, the BTC president, stepped forward to take on the job of trainer, and for the occasion the players donned the two complete team strips that Stobbe had brought from abroad at his own expense. On 9 May, the two teams played a public match against one another, with the blue-and-whites beating the red-and-whites 5-0—all the goals

32 ■ Miklós Bély: "A gimnáziumi sportélet kialakulása [The Evolution of Sport in Academic Secondary Schools]," *Testnevelés* 1940 (vol. 13, no. 7): p. 544 & *ibid.* (no 8): pp. 623, 630–631 & 639.

33 ■ Lajos Gerhárd, ed.: *A magyar sport reneszánszának története 1896 tól napjainkig* [The Story of the Rebirth of Hungarian Sports from 1896 to Our Day]. Vols. I–IV. Budapest, Magyar Sport Pantheonja, 1932. p. 189.

35 ■ Thus football, despite not being one of the sports events in the millennial programme due to its relatively late introduction to Hungary, had a big hand in keeping the Millennial Racetrack going. Furthermore, all but one of the 19 domestic matches played by the national football team between 1903 and 1911 were staged at this arena, thereby ensuring its survival and football's further progress.

being scored by Ray, who was essentially the only person who really understood the game. Despite the driving rain, there were a hundred curious spectators. For the autumn, the whole racetrack was transformed: the football pitch had been put under grass, the areas for the athletics events were renovated, the cycling track was asphalted and given higher bankings on the turns, and new stands were put up.

Although at that time it was still cycling that was followed with the greatest interest, a guest appearance in Budapest against BTC by the renowned Vienna Cricket and Football Club promised to be a plum event. The first official match between clubs was eagerly looked forward to. In an article announcing the match, *Sport-Világ* predicted a win for Vienna, though not without handing out a few compliments to the Hungarian players: alongside the Englishman Yolland, who was comfortable in any position on the field, Ray was "quick and inventive", Hajós "very useful", Ernő Lindner "distinguished by his determination, his tirelessness and a good eye", etc. The publicity had the desired effect, and on 31 October 1897 nearly 2,000 spectators—"experts, ladies, fellow sportsmen and laymen", the more genteel wearing top hats and equipped with field glasses—were present to watch as the players stepped out onto the "sandy, springy turf" of the Millennial Racetrack in the black-and-blue Vienna strip and the blue-and-white of BTC. The match lived up to expectations in every respect. No one was put out by the absence of nets on the goals, or the fact that the sand of the long-jump pit lay within the pitch, or even the fact that the referee for the game was Mr Lowe, the Viennese team's own manager, whose two sons were playing for the side. At three o'clock that afternoon, when "Alfréd Guttmann [...] tossed the ball to Ray, the captain"—football was under way in Hungary. There was never any doubt about the outcome (there were eight Englishmen playing for Vienna, whereas BTC had just Yolland and Thomas Ashton, and the rest had little in the way of skills), but the defeat by only two goals to nil was no disgrace at all. The public had a fine time, though they were hardly very discerning experts, as apart from the goal in each half of the game, they took the greatest pleasure in the wrestling holds applied by the robust Hungarian defence.[36]

The match created a stir in the Hungarian sports world, with the defeat not discouraging anyone.[37] By the middle of November, there were footballers from four teams training at the Millennial Racetrack: in addition to BTC, there were players from Hungarian Gymnasts' Circle (Magyar Testgyakorlók Köre, MTK) MÚE and the Technical University Football Team (Műegyetemi Football Csapat, MFC). BTC's footballers were not selfish with their skills, and it became customary for club members to allow youngsters to join in at their training sessions. Over the

36 ■ *Sport-Világ*, 31 October 1897, p. 5 and 7 November 1897, p. 5. In these years Alfréd Hajós used his original (Guttmann) and newly acquired family name alternately.

37 ■ It is an interesting coincidence that a few years later, on 15 December 1901, it should likewise be an Austrian team who were the Hungarians' first opponents in water polo, another sport that came from Britain. At the Diana Bad in Vienna, Wiener Athletic Sport Club beat the players of the Hungarian Swimming Club (MUE) by 14 0. Back home, the Hungarians commented sourly: "That's another sport not designed with Hungary in mind..." See Márton Homonnai: *Vizipóló* [Water Polo]. Budapest: own imprint, 1935, p. 11.

ensuing months, numerous new football teams were formed, some within existing sports clubs, others apart from them, both in Budapest and in provincial towns. In this early period, players and teams were still learning from one another, and a huge advantage was gained by any club able to call on the services of a British or Austrian player. There could be no question as yet of having foreign trainers or sophisticated tactics; more important were enthusiasm and inter-team competitiveness. On 1 January 1898, BTC, MÚE and MFC welcomed the New Year with home matches; then, in early February, they went ahead with the first domestic inter-club matches. These encounters were played as challenge matches, where refusal would have been tantamount to turning tail and disgracing the club colours. (On the other hand, an individual could be a member of more than one club: Hajós, for example, played both for BTC and also, as an architecture student, for the MFC football team.) When MFC challenged BTC to a match on 6 February 1898, BTC sent their second team into action as a sign of their superiority to domestic rivals; since the university students won 5–0, a rematch became all-important to BTC, and their first team duly won that by 3–0 a few weeks later. Matches then came in quick succession, drawing also MAC, the Buda Football Team (Budai Football Csapat) and BBTE.

This heroic age was shaped by a spirit of genuine enthusiasm, and it was characterised by a friendly and good-humoured atmosphere. Football, being a team sport, was a powerful agent in creating a sense of community, and it exerted a remarkable influence on younger males. The delights of expending physical energy and the sheer aesthetics of movement were to be found in other sports as well, but football was practically the only one through which a shared experience of exertion, self-sacrifice, success alternating with failure, along with the excitement and liberating power of the game, could be obtained. Given that it was a nascent sport, a skilful player could soon stand out and win honours for himself and his team. All this combined to make football a magnet for young men. Pupils at secondary school were banned from participation in competitive sports organised by outside clubs, but it was not unknown for them to adopt aliases and even disguises to play. One such instance occurred on 16 April 1900, when BTC played host to the formidable Slavia of Prague at the Millennial Racetrack in front of 7,000 spectators. The Hungarian team had an agile goalkeeper, who appeared under the name "Other", wearing a glued-on false beard and moustache that could hardly have helped his performance.[38]

A contemporary newspaper report documented the occasion when, on 31 December 1900, the BTC's players welcomed the new century with their self-abandoned revelling:

38 ■ *Esti Budapest,* 15 April 1954, p. 4. Educational authorities eventually came to realise that nothing they said was going to diminish football's popularity and decided it better to try and take it under their supervision rather than decry it. In 1906 they started a national football championship under the aegis of the Secondary Schools' Football Association in which nine teams (eight of them from Budapest) took part. See Miklós Bély: "A gimnáziumi sportélet kialakulása [The Evolution of Sport in Grammar Schools]," *Testnevelés* 1940 (vol. 13, no. 10): p. 797.

They went out to the Millennial ground in good humour on New Year's Eve, and they started playing a few minutes before midnight and carried on playing until the midnight chimes came to an end.

The "match", played on a snow-covered pitch and in a heavy snowfall, could not have lasted a quarter of an hour, but it was enough for them to declare that a Hungarian footballer, Gusztáv Faubel, had scored the first goal of the 20th century.[39]

The cosy atmosphere and unaffectedness of those early years—not to speak of football's predominantly urban and (petty) bourgeois roots—were manifested in the fact that a fair number of the clubs, and indeed the Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ) itself, would initially conduct their official business in coffee-houses and restaurants. The exceptionally popular "33" FC of Buda, who managed to uphold the game's amateur ethos longest of all, had their club "premises" (and themselves installed as regulars) at a reserved table at the Schütz Restaurant in the Second District. There were the Metropolitan Gymnastics Club (Fővárosi Torna Club—at the Fritz in the Eighth district) and the Typographia Sport Club (at the Stirling in the Eighth district). In addition, coffee-houses provided "offices" for, among others, the Budapest Sport Club (at the Műcsarnok in the Sixth district), MÚE (the Edison in the Sixth district), the Budapest Athletics Club (Budapesti Atlétikai Klub, BAK), which was an offshoot of MTK (at the Splendid in the Seventh district), along with MTK itself and BTC (both at the Kristály in the Sixth district). The latter coffee-house, along with the Kispipa Restaurant in the Sixth district, even advertised the fact that sportsmen met regularly on their premises, and that all the sports papers could be read there.[40]

Between 1897 and 1900, Hungarians clubs played 140 matches, of which 57 featured Budapest teams against teams from abroad and another 63 against one another, while just 20 involved provincial clubs taking on one another.[41] These numbers are a true reflection of the genuine desire for instruction that was cultivated by Hungarian players, who had nothing at all to lose, but a huge amount to learn, by competing against indisputably stronger Austrian and Bohemian teams. If, by any chance, they happened to win—as happened for the first time for MFC in a match against Victoria Athletic Sport Club on 12 March 1899—that only enhanced their prestige and fanned the general enthusiasm for football.

It was after seeing one such match that a few teenagers decided to found the Újpest Football Team (Újpesti Football Csapat). They soon managed to collect enough money to purchase their first leather ball, then, in October 1899 they

39 ■ *Sport-Világ*, 5 January 1901, p. 7.

40 ■ Ferenc Horváth (ed.): *Football könyv. A Magyar Labdarugók Szövetsége összes szabályai és a sportegyesületek jegyzéke.* [Football Book. The Rules of the Association of Hungarian Footballers and a Register of Sports Clubs]. Budapest: Magyar Labdarugók Szövetsége, 1903, pp. 84–87; Pál Fekete: *Orth es tarsai.. (Orth György–Schlosser Imre–Zsák Károly)* [Orth and his Associates (György Orth, Imre Schlosser and Károly Zsák)]. Budapest: Sport, 1963, p. 44.

41 ■ György Pálfy (ed.): *A sport enciklopédiája*, Vol. 2, p. 147.

moved from the People's Island grounds on the Danube, just north of Margaret Island (used by players of the indigenous Hungarian ballgame of *méta* (see Part I, *HQ* 181) to a sandy, weed-filled strip beside a jute factory on the riverbank. In February 1900, they joined the Újpest Gymnastics Club (Újpesti Torna Egylet, ÚTE), established in 1885 and destined to win 20 national league championships and 8 HFA cups. They now needed a permanent ground, and believed they had found one in the form of a field adjacent to a cotton mill. The club's president, Lajos Baráth, and first-team captain, Károly Dinich, togged up in high hats and tails and paid a call on Count László Károlyi, who owned the estate. The count appreciated their eagerness and let them have the ground for three years, and the team members then worked to convert it into a football pitch. The early matches—the first taking place on 29 April—were arranged by issuing challenges, the details of which were always a matter for the team captains to agree. With Újpest it became the custom to mark any victories in verse, which was then sung by the whole team in a celebratory post-match get-together with their opponents at the Széchenyi coffee-house. By the time the national championships got underway in the 1901 season, ÚTE were among the Second Division teams, and four years later they had gained promotion to the First Division, by which time a more orthodox ground had been constructed for them on People's Island.[42]

Another of Budapest's great teams, (28 times league champions and 20 times cup winners), Ferencváros Gymnastics Club (Ferencvárosi Torna Club, FTC), had similarly improbable and informal beginnings. The first players for Ferencváros raised dust on pitches in Rezső Square or on the fields next to the Technical University, depending on which the police had driven them away from. By the late autumn of 1899, however, club members and friends had prepared a ground and a surrounding wooden fence on Soroksár Road, on the Pest bank of the Danube running past Csepel Island, with a scrapped horse-drawn tram carriage making do as dressing-room and equipment store. The following year, a few rows of seats had been installed on one side of the pitch by way of a grandstand, while a railway embankment on the other side formed the terraces. Since the original dimensions of 90 x 45 meters did not come up to the regulation size, the pitch had to be widened later on. Construction of FTC's present ground on Üllői Road started in 1910, by which time the team had already won five championships. This sports complex, built at a cost of half a million crowns (approximately 20,000 pounds sterling), had a grassed football pitch of 110 x 65 meters, a raised and banked running track around it, stands to accommodate 20,000 spectators, a gymnastics hall, clubhouse and restaurant. Once it was opened on 12 February 1911, it was often used to host the matches played by the Hungarian national team.

The third of the defining teams of Hungarian football's first half-century, the 22 times league champions and 12 times cup-winner MTK, started up later but

42 ■ Károly Dinich: "Az újpesti futball őskora [The Prehistoric Days of Football in Újpest]," *Testnevelés*, September 1934 (vol 7, no. 8): pp. 429–433.

achieved its first successes even sooner. The club was founded by gymnasts in 1888, after splitting off from the National Gymnastics Club (Nemzeti Torna Egylet) that had taken them to task for organising an athletics meeting and giving the spectators totalizer facilities to place bets. At the end of the 19th century, MTK members supported a wide range of the fashionable sports of the day (athletics, wrestling, cycling, weightlifting, rambling, gymnastics, swimming and fencing). Lacking a ground and hall of their own, MTK members would train in parks and by roadsides or at Károly Fodor's fencing school. Later on, they were also allowed to make use of the gym at the grammar school in Markó Street. The club's directors were not in favour of football, partly on account of the sport's roughness and partly because of the players' unpreparedness; this eventually led to a large contingent of malcontents interested in football walking out to form the Budapest Athletics Club in 1900. The now diminished MTK was finally obliged to bow to realities, and the following year it created its own football section, which played its first match on 20 October 1901. The next season, MTK started in the Second Division of the league, but by 1903 they were in the First Division, winning the championship in 1904 thanks to the short passing game they adopted, as opposed to the primitive kick-and-rush style cultivated by FTC. It was at MTK that the business of buying players, team-building and fine-tuning tactics was developed most deliberately, from the second decade of the 20th century onwards. One British coach succeeded another at the club: following a Scot called Robertson came a succession of four English trainers, and for a while there was even an English player by the name of Lane.[43] Through the good offices of the mayor of Budapest, István Bárczy, MTK were given a sizeable plot of land on Hungária Boulevard in order to construct a stadium, the ground being opened on 31 March 1912, with Bárczy taking the kick-off. MTK beat FTC 1:0.

The formation of the Hungarian Football Association on 19 January 1901 was a major step in the institutionalisation of football in Hungary. From then onwards, it was the MLSZ that looked after the registration of teams and the conduct of official matches, made and published rules and regulations, inspected the condition of grounds, controlled accounts, brought rulings on contentious issues, and ran the Hungarian Championship from season to season. The commencement of the league championship rapidly transformed the game. In the early days, a few short years before, football had been driven by a spirit of unalloyed amateur enthusiasm and fair play, but its popularity turned it into a spectator sport and, within no time at all, a business which had little place for idealism. Instead, success became the prime consideration, and hence teams were increasingly dependant on growing incomes, which in those days was essentially a function of ticket sales at the turnstile. This put teams with their own ground at a huge advantage. Cushioned by growing incomes, it was easy for the wealthier teams to get round the amateur

43 ■ For the best summary of the changes in the tactical armoury of Hungarian football teams and the foreign influences that lay behind these, see Péter Szegedi: "A magyar futball európai expanziója, avagy hogyan lettek tanítók a tanítottakból [Hungarian Football's Expansion into Europe, or How the Students Became Teachers]," *Szociológiai Szemle* 2003, no. 2, pp. 3–41.

rules, even in its early years, the football championship was attended by frequent scandals: bribing of players in the opposing team, inducements to talented players to switch clubs, covert payments that were forbidden under the amateur code, the shutting out of rival teams from grounds that would guarantee good "gates" at matches—all features that had far more to do with commercial speculation than clean sport. The system of the "shamateur" progressively gained currency in Hungary, the principal beneficiaries of which were popular, cash-rich clubs which could call on the support of influential backers.

This was also around the time when organised camps of football supporters emerged. There developed a build-up of distinctive links between club and fans, as well as—and this was sociologically speaking the main aspect—a strong sense of cohesion within each camp of supporters. To begin with, of course, it was for the fans' liking or dislike for the players and for one or another style of play that formed the basis for such identification; in time what became crucial was what the team or club was seen to represent in the eyes of a supporter who was prepared to offer his loyalty. Club loyalties might have their origins in local, social, ethnic, religious or factory ties, depending on the sort of community of which they had become a symbol. The size and dedication of the supporter base naturally also had a bearing on the income that could be expected from ticket sales. R.W. Lewis has formulated much the same set of concerns in relation to the emergence of football in England around the turn of the 19th into the 20th century. As he concludes, public opinion was worried that: 1) football would lose its status as a national sport because it was tending more just to push up spectator numbers; 2) the influx of money was perverting and corrupting the spirit of pure amateurism; 3) unsporting professionalism was an attack on the game's idealism; 4) the football association itself had fallen into the hands of professionals; 5) football was increasingly being withdrawn from private schools and being taken over by the masses; and 6) any sense of fair play was coming up against supporters' fanatical rooting for their own team's victory at any price.[44]

Among the victims of these changes were two clubs—BTC and MAC—that from the start had played a leading role in Hungarian football and in amateur sports generally. Therefore, in 1901, they were able to enter the country's first league championship in Division One. Both clubs were quick to use the services of English coaches to work with their footballers, though admittedly Harry Perry only did this at MAC for want of someone better, since he had originally been engaged, in early 1896, to help the athletes with their preparations for the Athens Olympics. BTC, by contrast, was the first Hungarian club to employ a professional football coach when they took on a certain Mr Cox in 1902, and that systematic striving to polish the team's skills was evident as well in their arrangements for matches

44 ■ R. W. Lewis: "Touched Pitch and Been Shockingly Defied: Football, Class, Social Darwinism and Decadence in England, 1880–1914," in: *Sport in Europe: Politics, Class, Gender. The European Sports History Review,* ed. J. A. Mangan. London & Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1999, vol. 1, pp. 121–122.

against foreign opponents. Nevertheless, before the decade was out, both BTC and MAC had dropped out of the First Division. In the latter case that was no great surprise, because MAC regularly ended up in bottom place, but BTC actually won the first two championships and were even able to hold their own against foreign teams. The reasons for decline in both cases were to be found in the attitudes adopted by club officials. When BTC announced that they were not going to field a team for the 1905 championship, the justification they offered for the decision was that as the founders of football in Hungary, they considered their prime task to be the raising of standards in the game, and they were best able to achieve that through playing foreign teams. To that they tacked on a comment that the general direction being pursued by the MLSZ was anti-sporting in spirit, being more akin to settling the results of games at the card table.[45] (BTC rejoined the league in 1907, but by then they were not a patch on their former selves and quite incapable of replicating their earlier successes.) An even dimmer view of the trends was taken by MAC. An album published to mark the club's 50th anniversary declared:[46]

> The moral decay that has set to work in Hungarian football has unstoppably pursued its course, rendering it ever more difficult, indeed impossible, for teams of amateur gentlemen to prevail against semi-professional teams.

Although creeping (and one-sided) professionalism had gradually tarnished initial idealism, England—perhaps merely because it was such a far-off land—continued to stand as a symbol of perfection, invincibility and fair play in the eyes of the Hungarian footballing public. Extraordinary significance was therefore attached to the arrival in Budapest of two English clubs, Richmond Athletic and Football Club and Surrey Wanderers, in Eastertide of 1901, for a series of matches against Hungarian club teams and casual selected teams. Hungarian players prepared themselves determinedly, but respectfully to face their English amateur guests, and over six matches played between 7 and 13 April—"the Holy Week for Hungarian football"—duly learned whatever they could (see the report appended separately). The serious defeats that were inflicted, and the goal difference of 2 scored against 31 conceded, did not dispirit either players or spectators, as the principal point was the encounter with the masters of the game. As the report in *Sport-Világ* put it: "The aim on this occasion was not national rivalry, but instruction from the Englishmen's game."[47]

English club teams proved more than willing to make the trip to Hungary in later years as well. At the end of the first decade, the list of teams that had followed the example of Richmond AFC and Surrey included a Civil Service FC, Oxford University

45 ■ *A Budapesti Torna Club évkönyve 1904* [The BTC Yearbook 1904]. Budapest: Ifj. Kellner Ernő, 1905, pp. 15–18.

46 ■ Ferenc Zuber: *A Magyar Athletikai Club története,* p. 182.

47 ■ *Sport-Világ,* 14 April 1901, p. 103. The MLSZ organised a similarly ambitious programme during Whitsuntide in 1909, with the Hungarian national team playing matches with England (losing 2-4), Austria (1–1) and again England (2–8) on three successive days in front of altogether 30,000 spectators.

FC, Southampton, Corinthian FC, the London-based Casuals FC, Tottenham Hotspur, Pilgrims FC, Chelsea FC, Woolwich Arsenal, Manchester United, and Barnsley (who were a professional team). This sort of stimulus was necessary too for Hungarian football, as otherwise the bulk of the international matches undertaken by Hungarian teams were against teams—principally Austrian and Bohemian—that were likewise operating within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Football, then, took root in Hungary during the first decade of the 20th century, and it displayed a very similar pattern in both its "growth" and its "degeneration" to the game in its English hearth. It evolved from beginnings in the world of physical exercise to encroach on the domains of entertainment, business, mass culture and, later on, even politics, and in the process turned itself into an event and news. Football became a social phenomenon, part of

From: Dörmögő Dömötör újabb utazásai háborúban és békében *(Grumbling Gordon's New Travels in War and Peace), by Zsigmond Sebők illustrated by Béla Moldován. Budapest, Franklin-Társulat, 1914.*

everyday life. One distinctive piece of evidence of that in Hungary was its appearance in a popular series of illustrated children's stories, that was launched in 1912 about a character named "Dörmögö Dömötör"—Grumbling Gordon, a friendly bear with the demeanour of a provincial gent who gets into one scrape after another, coming up against stranger and stranger things in the course of his peregrinations in the big, wide world. Within two years, Grumbling Gordon was appearing as a devastatingly skilled footballer who, playing in a Ferencváros club strip, scored 19 goals in response to a challenge laid down by a team from Windsor.[48] ❧

48 ■ Zsigmond Sebők: *Dörmögő Dömötör újabb utazásai háborúban és békében* [Grumbling Gordon's Latest Travels in War and Peace], illustrated by Béla Moldován. Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1914, pp. 1–58.

Lajos Molnár

Athletics and Diverse Peoples

Excerpt from *Athletika.* Budapest, Fekete Bernát, 1875

That *England* is at such a high pitch of material and intellectual greatness, that the life of the English nation is happy, and that its people stands so highly in development is influenced in no small part by the fact that the English nation *consists of men*. The Englishman is strong and able-bodied. His physique is sound, his strength fully developed, his dexterity amazing. He is striking for his character, originality and cleanliness. This is a nation generally characterised by level-headed masculinity. His outbursts of temper are moderated by uncommon coolness, he is not deflected from his set goal; his courage does not know fear, nor his will, the impossible. Everything great, lofty and original captures his heart with enormous gusto. The spirit of improvement, progress and demand dominates with this nation.

He has the common good—his own and the nation's glory and advancement—at heart. "This nation is proud of its state and its wealth, but most of all of being English and of having been born in England."

He does not imitate foreign fashions, everybody except the lowest class dresses, converses and amuses themselves the same way. The English are one of the freest nations in Europe; nevertheless, it is they who bear the greatest respect for the law. Enthusiasm for nationality, state and public affairs is nowhere so great as with this nation. Publicness and unconstrained freedom are elemental to the Englishman; he is unhappy if he cannot speak what he thinks or do what he wishes. In his public appearances he is plucky and determined. "Anyone here can be anything, only let

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During the latter half of the 19th century, as part of the slow rise of the middle-classes, efforts were made to import into Hungary sports that were accessible to the broader masses. In 1874, the wide adoption of athletics was urged in a series of newspaper articles by Count Miksa Esterházy, who had become acquainted, on diplomatic postings to Britain and America, with "pedestrianism". One year later, Lajos Molnár, a law student, put together a book entitled Athletika, *which drew on the tenets of a Darwinist social philosophy to argue for popular interest in athletics. Molnár considered that the English offered the model that was most applicable to sporting excellence and was distinctly unimpressed with the other great nations of Europe. He thought that Hungarians were physically and intellectually cut out for sport and should adopt the British educational system, with its provisions for methodical physical exercise—along with athletics in the broad sense of the word.*

him be a *gentleman*—that is, the sort of person whose heart and head are in the right place." He never goes back on his word, and places a high value on his integrity. He never abides humiliation or ridicule, especially in relation to his nationality. The Englishman loves his family, and he is not much inclined to seek amusement beyond the threshold of his house.

His intelligence is characterised by composure, his judgement by sobriety, his mind by profundity. The Englishman's cold discourse is experienced chiefly in proximity to women. Here a man never forgets decorum; his speech and conversation never degenerate into ambiguity. Nowhere is female virtue held in such high esteem as here.

It is well-known that the Englishman raises his sons for the *homeland,* his daughters for *domestic life*.

We do not mean to say that all these many fine and manly attributes of the English are the outcome of a single measure, a single factor; but it cannot be denied that a large part in their development is played by the *education system*, where the establishments are not mind-building and *body-atrophying institutions* as elsewhere. The practical-minded Englishman, whilst he trains the mind, does not forget his *employment of physical strength* either; physical exercise always forms an essential part of education. Hence it is that the English young, especially the aristocracy, despite all their power and money, are not so pampered as with other nations. Adults, too, once they have emerged from these establishments, still continue to develop their bodies and minds. Here in the most fabulous number are those beneficent and salutary institutions that are effective to such a highly multiplied degree in galvanizing, training and safeguarding the life of the individual, the family, society and the nation. Athletics may be pursued with the greatest passion in England. [...]

If England's population is manly, we ascribe that unconditionally to those institutions which, it is our firm conviction, have the most massive influence on the development of manliness. We consider that the institution of *athletics,* in the improved, modern form that is the fashion in England, to be a factor that has repercussions for the life of the individual, the family, society and, indeed, on political life.

Other nations are now starting to see this; indeed, civilised nations are also applying the principle, at least in primitive form, in education. Yet, is that enough, one wonders? Could the nations come to agreement on this? "No", one can declare, after brief reflection. *It is necessary to adopt the institution in its entire extent, in every detail. It needs to be generalised, popularised and adapted to national customs in order that it should belong to the nation, be national.* Only in this way will it be possible to pluck the fruits from the tree.

The flourishing nations hardly sense the necessity for this institution. They still stand in a position of power, and the future is barely considered. They have their well-known possessions, and maybe this is reassuring for them as well; but *nations in the stage of development* need to take steps to make their national life permanent, *to put muscle on their race,* to consolidate and guarantee their future.

We *Hungarians* count among the latter.

Let us see what we are like and whether we have a need for the *institution of athletics.* ❧

The English in Budapest

From the magazine *Sport-Világ* [Sports World]
14–15 April 1901

Richmond F.C. vs. M. Ú. E. 6–0
Richmond F.C. vs. B. T. C. 6–0
Richmond F.C. vs. M. F. C. 4–0
Richmond F.C. vs. Hungarian Football Association 4–0

[...] The great week has passed, a week that will be remembered for a long time in the history of Hungarian football and the like of which has never been seen on the continent. The weather has been fair all week, as if Nature herself had taken delight in this great sporting event. Two English teams played six matches against Hungarian opposition, and the English won five (the sixth was still underway as we went to press).

Everyone was prepared for this, since these were not international matches, and the objective was rather to learn from the English game—so that the Hungarian players would be able to see how mental features can be disciplined in football, how sober thinking is able to control emotions and how physical skills can be developed to perfection.

This game is the harmony between physical skills, intelligence and spirit. The greater the harmony, the better it gets. Intelligence is the most important, the physical and the mental characteristics are its instruments. Even with them, we are still a long way from the real game, for intelligence needs to rule over them.

After the first more or less accurate description of football was published in Hungary in 1879, the game was being played towards the end of 1880s; and from 1897 onwards, it spread rapidly in Budapest among students and the members of sports clubs. Within just a few years, football was hugely popular, with the big matches drawing more spectators than either horse or cycle racing, despite the excitements of speed and betting offered by the latter. In the early years, Hungarian footballers were eager to pick up what they could from more experienced teams from abroad. Even in the certain knowledge of defeat, they sought out opportunities for matches with famous Austrian and Bohemian teams, bolstered as they frequently were with British players. British teams first visited Budapest at Easter in 1901, playing no less than six matches within one week, with the Hungarian public and players alike being able to delight in a feast of football served up by the then-masters of the game.

If not perfection itself, it was nevertheless a manifestation of this harmony that we saw in the play of the English teams, and hopefully, this will have an effect on our players, whereby their play will return to the desirable style and will improve noticeably. [...]

Day One

[...] The game was played out at a rather rapid pace and in a sportsmanlike manner on both sides. M. Ú. E. held out well and showed good team play, which perceptibly surprised Richmond F.C. All of the half-backs played well, but it was the goalkeeper who put in the best performance for his team. Only one of the goals could be blamed on him, when he did not attempt to save a long ball that sailed over his head and into the net.

The forwards had relatively little to do, and they squandered a host of good chances, as if they had been inhibited in some way. The game was refereed by Frigyes Windett (B.T.C.).

Day Two

On Easter Monday, a huge crowd assembled at the Millennial Racetrack to witness what promised to be the most interesting game to be played against the Richmond team. They were not to be disappointed, since the game indeed turned out to be one of the best. The fast pace and the diversity of attacking play proved a great spectacle, and Richmond's sophisticated team play was not as dominant during this strong match as on the previous day. Although the result was the same, the Richmond players unquestionably had to work harder for victory.

B. T. C. began the game with fierce attacks, to which the English replied in kind. The game surged to and fro at a rapid pace, and in about ten minutes, B. T. C. conceded the first goal. The backs and the goalkeeper hesitated for a moment in a dangerous situation, and one of the Richmond forwards took advantage. Richmond then continued to press strongly. As a result of their unflagging attacks, they scored another three goals in the first half.

The English were off to a skillful start to the second half and were soon pressing on B. T. C. Cox passed the ball to Gettins and sprinted forward along the sideline. Gettins passed it back to Cox, and after a short struggle, after barely 3 minutes, Richmond had scored again. B. T. C.'s tempo flagged somewhat after that, which suited the English perfectly. Rather leisurely play ensued for about half an hour, until the sixth goal put an end to that. B. T. C. pressed ahead fiercely, giving it their everything, trying to score a goal. This was made more likely by the fact that Waller had swapped places with Thomas, thereby significantly weakening the Richmond defence. During one of the dangerous attacks, Minder received the ball in an offside position. Although the referee blew his whistle, the B. T. C. strikers, overflowing with ardour, played on and put the ball past the keeper. The

crowd, not having heard the referee's whistle, cheered and applauded. This soon turned to jeering at the referee before people settled down quietly, as they understood what had happened. B. T. C. continued to press ahead vehemently, but were unable to score, and the clock slowly ticked away on the match without any change in the result.

Most of the B.T.C. players had played well, but it was Windett who put in the best performance and showed that his qualities are on a par with the Richmond players. Guttmann showed a surprising improvement. He has developed into one of the most useful forwards in the course of the winter, and B. T. C. owed most of its fierce attacks primarily to him. Báthori in the B. T. C. goal was flustered; it seemed to us that some of the goals depended solely on his indecision. The game was refereed by Ferencz Gillemot (M.F.C.).

Day Three

[...] The third match was played in front of a smaller crowd, and Thomas was replaced by Carber Gray in the Richmond team.

[...] M. F. C. concentrated mainly on defence and showed great skill in marking the most dangerous [English] players. However, their attacking was weak, because the forwards were left on their own and rarely received any help from the half-backs. The [hosts'] defensive tactics paid off to the extent that the result was more favourable than on the last two days. Nevertheless, it may have been better to play more offensively and perhaps manage to score a goal!

The game was refereed by Károly Iszer (B. T. C.).

Day Four

A sizeable crowd assembled for Richmond's farewell match, in which the English met the Hungarian Football Association Selection.

[...] As regards the composition of this first Hungarian selection, it seems fairly successful at first sight. The choice of the half-backs, the backs, the goalkeeper and the two wingers cannot be questioned. However, the three inside-forwards did not fit in with the team. Mannó is simply unable to get used to the unselfish style of play which is so essential for a forward, Missky does not have sufficient skill on the ball, and Gillemot is not sudden enough in his movements. Two things all of the forwards lack are composure and deliberation. Rather, they play whimsically and are unsystematic and panic-stricken in front of the opponents' goal. In contrast, the half-backs and the backs must be praised, and there is no ground for criticism against them. They played a wise and entirely unselfish game. Báthori, the goalkeeper, also played very well on this occassion and could not be blamed for any of the goals conceded.

The effect of Richmond's play on the Hungarian players was evident during the match. Their play improved considerably, and Gilly, Ray, Koch and Lucius all put

in a much better performance than what we are used to seeing from them. The half-backs and the goalkeeper are usually capable of good performances and, therefore, do not need to be praised specifically.

In the evening, a banquet was held at the Hotel Royal in honour of the Richmond team with the participation of all the players, along with numerous members of the three host clubs and representatives of the Budapest press. The English players each proposed a fareweall toast and, in fine words, recalled Hungarian hospitality, and the players' attentiveness and fair play.

Cox's speech was very interesting from a sporting point of view. He criticised the Hungarians' style of play, declaring that it is much better for teams to go onto all-out attack, rather than play defensively, since scoring a goal and conceding many is a more honourable result than scoring none and conceding fewer. He said he was truly sorry that his team had not conceded any goals, because in that case people in England would have thought they had to fight hard for the wins. As it is, though, they will think they faced inferior opposition.

Day Five and Day Six

[...] The play of the Surrey Wanderers is in many ways different from that of Richmond. The players of the latter aim to keep possession for as long as they can and only pass the ball to their teammates when they cannot move forward with it. The Surrey Wanderers players, on the other hand, hardly dribble at all, preferring to rely on quick and precise passes. The forward line especially excelled at this, and the fast pace and the precision of their passing bore evidence of two things, first, a high level of skill on the ball, and second, exact knowledge of where their nearest teammates are positioned.

Their defence, which is markedly weaker than the forwards, is not worthy of similar praise.

As regards the Hungarian selections, the line-ups were relatively successful and if we consider that the hastily assembled teams did not have a chance to train together and amalgamate, we can even be satisfied with their performances. After all, 5–1 and 6–1 against Surrey Wanderers is not a bad result for our teams. Slavia, which is considered a much stronger team, lost to them by a similar score on day one. ❧

György Dragomán

Pickaxe

Chapter from the novel *The White King*

The mechanical diggers arrived on Sunday morning, we were playing football with the guys from the other street, they were leading four to two and the game was first to five, it was almost certain we'd be beat, but I didn't mind, since I wanted to go home already, because I was always at home on Sundays waiting for Dad, because when they took him away to the Danube Canal, that faraway canal they're building to connect the Danube with the sea, he promised he'd come get me and take me with him to the sea, true, I know Mom said I shouldn't wait for him, because after eight months of hard labour I might not even recognise him anymore, besides, we'd know in advance if he's coming home, but I didn't completely believe he was really in a labour camp, even though we'd already got a couple of prewritten camp postcards, no, I thought that maybe Dad wasn't really in a labour camp but only working in a secret research institute, just like he said to me when they took him away, and because I'd read that when the Americans were making the atomic bomb in Los Alamos, not even then was anyone allowed to know where the researchers really were, and I knew that Dad would come home all right, that he'd come get me and take me with him, that he'd take me to the sea, too, and I knew that even if he didn't recognise me I'd sure recognise him, because his picture, which I'd taken out of his old military ID booklet, was with me all the time, anyway, I wanted to go home, yes, I could hardly wait for them to score another goal against us and for the game to be over.

It was us on the attack, Big Prodán had the ball, when the diggers drove off the road right on to the football field, yes, they came all the way to the middle, one of

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György Dragomán

was born in Transylvania, Romania, where he spent his childhood until he moved to Hungary in 1988. His three works so far—two novels and a play—deal with East European dictatorship in its various manifestations. A fehér király *(The White King, 2005), a novel, from which the chapter we publish was taken, is a loosely connected chain of partly autobiographical short stories.*

them drove right towards Big Prodán and almost hit him, Prodán just barely jumped out of the way, and then both machines stopped in the middle of the field, they were buzzing real loud, the air was full of this smelly blue smoke, and then the two drivers turned off their motors at the same time, you couldn't hear a peep from anywhere, we were silent, too, we went over and stood around the machines, they were painted yellow and were rusting in lots of places, only the teeth of the scoops were sparkling just a little bit.

One of the drivers then climbed off his machine, stood right where he was, looked at Big Prodán, and said, Get over here. Prodán went over real slow, first he threw the ball over to Öcsi,and then he stopped in front of the worker, he was only fourteen years old, but he was big for his age, he was almost as tall as the driver, by then he hadn't been going to school in a year, because his dad had given him over to a construction project, you could tell he wasn't scared of the guy, anyway, he stopped right in front of him and said, Whadaya want.

The worker broke into a grin and drove a fist into the pit of Big Prodán's belly, Big Prodán doubled up, I'll knock your brains out if you keep talking to me like that, said the worker, but he wasn't yelling, no, and then he stepped back and watched with a smile as Prodán clutched a hand to his belly, What would you like, Sir, asked Big Prodán, meantime still clutching his belly. The worker nodded and said, That's better, you can talk nice too, huh, and then he looked at the other worker, who was still sitting there in the digger's seat, Hear that, Traján, he can talk nice too, at which the other one nodded, then spat on the ground, Good, he said, I'm glad.

The worker reached into his pocket and took out some money, gave it to Prodán and said, Get going, bring three packs of no-filter Karpacis, get running already, you know where to go, to the Szarvas restaurant, that's open on Sundays, too. Prodán nodded, turned, and headed off toward the asphalt road, but the worker called out, Hold on, this pockmarked worker might be there drinking, Pickaxe he's called, anyway, if you see him, tell him that Traján and his partner here say he can bring the shed, got that?

Prodán nodded and then headed off again, and the worker watched him go but then called after him, I said get running already, if you're not back here in five minutes I'll knock your brains out, you hear, and then he turned around, reached under the dredge's seat, and pulled out a big paper bag and a monkey-wrench, his eyes passed over us and he said, Come closer, all of you, don't be scared.

No one moved, I was staring at his work-boots, one of the laces was red, a genuine boot-lace, but the other one was just some home-made, twine-twisted lace, anyway, none of us moved, so the worker then unfolded the top of the bag, which he then held toward us, Real caramel, he said, go ahead, all of you, dig in.

The others then stepped closer, it was a real big bag, at least three kilos, I could see the caramel's coloured wrapping, so it really was caramel inside, he again held the bag toward us, Take some, he said, no need to be scared, and then Áronka took a step forward, he reached a hand into that bag and then pulled out his hand, which was full of caramels, and he popped one right into his mouth, why, he

didn't even take the paper off, that's how he chewed it all up, Thanks, said Áronka, his mouth full, and the worker just nodded and held out the bag toward the rest of us, Here you go, he said, take some, take some.

One after another everyone reached into the bag, everyone had taken some, everyone except me, but there was still caramel left, there was lots left, and the worker then looked at me and asked, What's a matter, dontcha want some, then he stepped toward me and held the bag right in front of my face, Don't you go offending me, take some, he said, and then I shook my head and said I can't eat sweets just now, though I really do like them, but the day before I'd eaten so many peppermints that my stomach just couldn't handle any more sweets, but the worker shook the bag, Oh come on, he said, sure you can have some, and then he reached in the bag and pulled out a piece of caramel, yes, pinching it between two fingers he held it out to me, and he said for me to hold my mouth open, he had a real big hand, his fingers were greasy, I saw that clear as day, I wanted to turn around and run away, but then I felt someone grab my shoulders from behind, it was the other worker, he'd come up behind me without me even noticing a thing, he held my shoulders tight, I heard him say for me not to move, because he'd rip me apart, and for me to hold my mouth open at once, and then with one hand he held my neck from behind, and I felt him squeeze my jaw from the side with his thumb and index finger so I'd open my mouth, but try as I did to shake my head and bite him, his grip was too tight, and then I heard one of the workers shout, Not like that, pinch his nose shut, Traján, and in no time I felt that I wasn't getting any air, I shut my eyes and I wanted to shout for them to let me go, that my dad would knock their brains out, I didn't want to open my mouth wide, I could feel my ears buzzing, and then all of a sudden that piece of caramel somehow ended up on my tongue, yes, with two fingers the worker stuffed it right into my mouth, his fingers had this bitter tobacco taste that turned my stomach, I wanted to spit that candy out, but they pressed my mouth shut and again pinched my nose tight, I couldn't even taste the caramel, only that it was coming apart between my teeth, wrapping and all, and then they let me go, I fell to the ground and I wanted to spit it out, but by then there was nothing in my mouth anymore, only that bitter tobacco taste remained, my throat was all bunched up, but there was no way I was about to cry, no, I shouted at them that my dad was going to kill them for this, but they only grinned, and then the one the other called Traján said they'd give my father a good belt in the gob, and for me to shut my trap, or else he'd stuff it with caramels, and then he looked at the others, All right then, boys, he said, you've had the sweets, but it's best you know you didn't get them for free, nothing in this world is free, you've gotta work for everything, and as the other one gave a nod he continued, Yep, he said, and he who doesn't work shouldn't eat, but all of you have already eaten, so now it's time to work, and as he said this he went over to the digger and took a big wool-felt sack off the back and threw it there on the ground in front of us, Here it is, he said, open it up, and the bag rolled right up to our feet, it was tied with a belt, everyone stepped back, no one wanted to touch

that bag, we only stood there and stared at the workmen, and they stared back at us, by now Traján was staring only at me, yes, he looked right in my eyes, I saw him lick his lips and I knew he was about to call on me to reach over there, he'd order me to reach for that bag and undo the belt, but then all at once Traján turned away, and so did the other one, they looked out toward the road, Big Prodán was just getting back with the cigarettes, he came running up to Traján, he handed him the cigarettes and the change, Traján pocketed two packs along with the change and he threw the third pack to the other worker, There you go, Feri, you go poison yourself, too, he said, and then he looked back at Prodán, Didn't you meet up with that pockmarked guy, and Prodán shook his head, and the one called Traján then spit on the ground, Fuck it, Pickaxe, fuck your mother-fucking mother, he said under his breath, then he looked again at Prodán, All right, but what are you standing here for, go ahead and hand out the shovels, and he gave that wool-felt sack a good kick, there's enough of them here, enough for everyone, so let's get a move on, we don't have all day, he said.

Prodán bent down and opened up the bag, which was full of short, iron-handled shovels, lots of them, at least forty, both the blades and the handles were painted with black enamel, Prodán picked one up, and looked at the worker called Feri, What do you want to do with them, he asked. The worker motioned toward the woods with his head, Not us, you're the ones who want to do with them, he said, A whole new neighbourhood is being built up there under the woods, you know, and one of the sewage lines will run right by here, and you will all dig part of that line, just like this, as community service work, so you can save the state some diesel oil.

Prodán looked up and said, Where? Here, on the football field? The man called Feri spat on the ground, You bet, he said, and in a sec we'll measure out exactly where.

Prodán was looking at the shovel, saying not a thing, but then he spoke all the same, But this is our field, he said. Then Traján stepped over to Prodán, Sure, he said, stopping in front of him, that's exactly why you all want to help do the digging, you're the ones who asked for it, your school, we got shovels just because of you, so enough gabbing, Everyone take a shovel, the sooner you start the sooner you'll finish, too, you're kids, you don't need to earn bread, so you got the time. At this Big Prodán took a step back, I don't go to school, he said, I work at a construction site, today's Sunday, so sure as hell today I'm not taking a shovel in my hands. Traján then swung back his arm, but he wasn't able to hit anymore, because the other one, the one called Feri, stepped up next to him and grabbed his arm, Wait, said Feri, this here's a smart boy, no sense being rough with him, and then he reached out that bag of caramel toward Prodán, You didn't get any sweets, take some.

At first Prodán didn't want to take any, but then he stuck in his hand, anyway, yes, his whole hand got all full of caramel, I saw that clear as day, and as he stuffed it all into his pocket he just about dropped one, and meanwhile the worker called Feri was still holding the bag toward him, Don't be shy, he said, and so Prodán stuck his hand in one more time and again put sweets in his pocket, and then the worker

called Feri folded shut the bag, All right, then, he said, you'll get more later, now help hand out the shovels, meantime Traján will measure out where the ditch will be, but Prodán didn't move, he looked at the diggers and then back again at the workman called Feri, Can I sit up on the dredging machine too, he asked.

The worker called Feri shrugged his shoulders, All right, he said, if the work goes well then far as I'm concerned you can sit up there, why, you can even start it up, but now go ahead and hand out those shovels, it's time to start the digging, don't worry, your school principal knows all about this, yep, he okayed all of you working here every afternoon, all of you attend school number twelve, don't you? Tell the others that long as they're working here they don't have to do their homework, you'll see, they'll even be glad.

Prodán nodded, Okay, he said, picking a shovel up off the ground that he then gave to Áronka, and then he gave one each to every one of us, one at a time, to me too, Here you are, Dzsátá, use it in good health. Of course he didn't give his little brother a shovel, only a caramel, he looked at the workers and said, That's my brother, he's gonna help me, at which the workman called Traján gave a grunt, but the one called Feri just nodded, All right then, he said, you two will be the brigade leaders, but if the work isn't going well, we'll find others to take your place, you'll see what a nice thing this sort of voluntary community service work is, what a good feeling it is to build the country, you can all be proud of yourselves that even being kids you're able to take part in this, besides, if you do decent work you'll finish the whole thing in a week, and that's nothing, you should just see the Danube Canal, now that's real digging for you.

A fiery heat came over me when he said that, and I reached into my pocket and felt my father's picture, no, never had I met anyone who'd worked at the Danube Canal, and I looked at that worker called Traján and saw him pull a folded-up sheet of paper from his pocket, unfold it, look at it a bit, and then he picked a shovel up off the ground, walked to the end of the field, struck that shovel in the ground by one of the home-made goal-posts, I've done it, I've measured it out, he shouted to the one called Feri, it goes straight right from here. Then Prodán and the workman called Feri lined us up, we didn't have to stand according to height, the point was only to stand in a nice neat line, not too far from each other, and then, once everyone had stood up, the worker called Traján gave Prodán a shovel, too, All right then, you don't have to work, but show the others how to use the tool, go ahead now and drive it into the ground.

At first Prodán didn't want to do it, yes, I could tell from the way he was holding the shovel that he would have most gladly attacked the worker, but then he started shovelling all the same, flinging the dirt behind him, and then the others also got down to work, and me too, the shovel's handle had a real awful grip, it broke into my palm, and the dirt was hard, so I had to drive the shovel into the ground with my feet, but the shaft was so short that I had to stoop over, and in no time my back was hurting, anyway, the work wasn't going so well, not only for me but also for the others, and while digging I kept thinking of the Danube Canal, of

how hard it must be to divert an entire river, and of just what my father was doing there, after all, because he'd written only a couple of times, and even then all he said was that he was fine, not another thing, so anyway, that's what I tried thinking of, and meantime my back was hurting all the more, and so was my palm, but I didn't dare stop working.

Of course by then Prodán hadn't been working for a while, no, he was walking back and forth behind us, telling us to keep it up, he even gave Áronka a good kick on the ass, but one of the workers yelled at him not to do it again or else he'd knock his brains out, it's enough if he just keeps an eye out for anyone not putting their all into their shovel, yes, they'll take care of the rest, and so from that point on Prodán didn't bother anyone, he just walked back and forth behind us and watched how we worked.

The workers meantime spread a blanket out on the ground by one of the diggers and lay down on that, the one called Traján puffed on a cigarette and the one called Feri began to eat something, I noticed them doing that when I turned around one time, and then Prodán sat down there, too, and by then only his kid brother was walking back and forth behind us, and when I looked back again, I saw that they were playing cards.

All at once Áronka fell, he was just about to try driving the shovel into the ground when his foot slipped off the blade and came out from under him, and he fell on his side and then he just lay there with one foot in the ditch, like someone who doesn't want to get back up at all, and then all of us stopped working and wiped our foreheads and gathered around Áronka, and Prodán's kid brother asked what the problem was, but Áronka didn't say a thing, he only shook his head.

Then one of the workers, the one called Feri, stood up and came over and looked at Áronka, All of you are weak, he said, you wouldn't last even a day on the Danube Canal, and then he said, All right, time for a break, and he said we can hold a fifteen-minute break, that meantime we should try to pull ourselves together, and that he was otherwise satisfied with us, because we've been doing decent work, and that we shouldn't worry, we can go home for lunch, but everyone's got to come back for the afternoon, because the work will last till dark, and he also said that they'd written everyone's name and also where he lives down on a sheet of paper, so they'll go after anyone who doesn't come back, because no one is allowed to sabotage community service work.

The worker then turned away and went over to one of the dredging machines while the rest of us sat down on the ground beside Áronka, everyone was resting, Janika alone was still moving, he was juggling the ball with a foot, why, he had such a feel for a ball that he could have kept it up all day long. Anyway, like everyone else I was there sitting on the ground looking at the ditch I'd dug, why, it wasn't deep at all, you could see tiny pebbles all along the sides, and the white roots of blades of grass, and then I pulled out my father's picture and looked at that, too, sure, it was smudged from being handled all the time, but his face was still clear as day, everyone used to say how much I looked like my father, one time

I looked at myself a long time in a pocket mirror while holding his picture up to it, too, and I really could tell that my chin and my mouth were just like his.

Anyway, I was sitting right there and looking at the picture when all of a sudden one of the workers stopped beside me, I could tell from his bootlaces that it was the one called Feri, and he leaned down and tore my father's picture right out of my hand, whatcha looking at, he asked, then he looked at the picture, holding it real close to his eyes, like someone who can't see well, Who's this? Your old man? he asked, but I didn't answer, I only nodded, and this fiery heat passed from the top of my head all the way through me, and my ears were practically on fire, too, and I couldn't say a thing, I couldn't say yes and I couldn't say no, all I could do was give a nod, and my stomach was in knots, and it felt completely as if a lump had begun moving from my stomach all the way up my gullet and my neck, and when it reached my throat, then somehow I did speak, yes, I asked, Do you know him? but my voice was really shaking, He's there, too, at the Danube Canal, you two came from there too, didn't you?

The worker then held an index finger in front of his mouth, bent down closer and hissed Shhh! and whispered that this was a state secret, meantime he gave me a wink, and then for a long time he didn't say a thing, he only kept looking at the picture, turning it about in his hands as if he couldn't see it right, meantime he licked his lips several times, then he shook his head and stood up straight and called out to the other worker, Get over here, Traján, get a load of this, you won't believe it!

The worker called Traján then put on the blanket the piece of bread he'd been chewing, stood up, and came over to us. When he got there, without a word the worker called Feri put the picture into his hand and said, Look at it good, at first you won't be able to tell, but just look at it extra careful. Then the worker called Traján looked at the picture for a long time, too, also turning it about in his hands, but then he shook his head, what am I supposed to see, he asked, Because I don't see a thing. Feri again licked his lips, That's because you're blind, that's why, he said, poking with an index finger at my father's face, Look at that mouth and you'll see clear as day that this is no one else but Pickaxe. Knitting his brow, Traján just stared at the picture a while before suddenly breaking into a grin, Holy Jesus, well I'll be, damn me if that's not Pickaxe. At this Feri started nodding, too, he tore the picture out of Traján's hand, Pickaxe it is, he said, and get a load of how young he was, get a load of how nice and smooth his face still was, I wouldn't even believe it if I didn't see it, and then he fell silent and looked at me. So then, you're Pickaxe's son, are you, and he extended a hand, and as I grasped it he patted my shoulder with his other hand, you can be proud of your dad, he said, he's a real decent guy.

He shook my hand tight, but it didn't hurt, and I asked, You two know him? You really know him? Traján nodded, You bet we know him, he said, He'll be here in no time, he's bringing the shed that we'll be staying in, and then he put the picture back in my hand, Here it is, put it away, he said. Is he really coming here? You swear? I asked, and even I could hear how much my voice was shaking, why,

I even felt my whole body shaking, like when you get the shivers from being cold. The worker called Feri then looked at me again and asked, What did you say, what are you called? I told him, and Feri nodded, Yep, he mentioned you, he did, sure, right, Traján, you remember too, huh, he said he hasn't seen you in a long time, and that he'll come look you up and that he'll bring something for you.

On hearing all this I got dizzy all of a sudden, I looked down at the ground, at my two shoes, and everything seemed to be turning round and round, the chunks of earth and the blades of grass and the pebbles too, yes, everything was spinning, I almost fell, but then the worker called Traján put an arm around me, It's all right, he said, get a hold of yourself. But I was still shaking, my father's postcards came to mind, plus how Mother had at first waited and waited for him to return, yes, she always shuddered when the doorbell rang, convinced that my father had finally been allowed to go home, You two are lying, I said, if my father came back, it's for sure he would have looked us up, he would have come home to us, to Mother and me, besides, my dad isn't called Pickaxe, my dad isn't friends with you two.

The worker called Feri then grabbed both of my shoulders and turned me toward him, Get a hold of yourself, he said again, How long has it been since you've seen your old man? Almost nine months, I said, and then the worker nodded, Nine months at the Danube Canal is a real long time, he said, and then he asked if I know what smallpox is, and I said that I know, it's a disease that's been wiped out already, and then the worker said, Yeah, yeah, sure, and he leaned even closer to me and started whispering, but so I could hardly hear what he was saying, and he whispered that he for one has seen men die from smallpox, because that disease still flares up here and there along the canal, especially in the re-education camps, but no one's allowed to talk about those camps, and that that's where my dad caught it, too, and it almost killed him, but he was lucky that on account of this they let him go, yep, they didn't do the whole re-education thing with him, because then he wouldn't remember a thing from his former life, which is why only his face had changed, from the pockmarks, that is, but so much so that you couldn't even recognise him anymore, and he's real ashamed because of this, and that's why he didn't write to us any more, and that's why he didn't dare look us up, because he's scared of what Mom and I would say to him, because he's got to gather up the courage and the strength, but when he arrives with the shed, then I'll see him for myself, anyway, and then the worker called Feri told me again not to be scared, and he held out that bag of caramel and said to go ahead and take some, and not to be scared, because I'll feel the call of blood kinship, anyway, and if I'm brave enough, then everything will be okay.

The two workers then sat back down on the blanket, but not before Traján slammed two shovels together and shouted that break was over, and that we had another hour of work left, then everyone could go home for lunch, and we'd have to come back only in two hours.

Then we began shovelling again, and I was still all dizzy, and the shovel seemed to move by itself in my hands, yes, I just flung more and more dirt behind myself,

and all the while I kept watching the road, but no one came, and I didn't want to be looking that way all the time, but no matter how I tried I just couldn't stand not to, and then I shut my eyes, because I didn't want to see that empty road, and I opened them only when I struck the shovel into the earth, but not even that helped, because even with my eyes shut I could see my father's face before me, and as the earth crumbled up I thought of the smallpox, and I didn't want to imagine the pockmarks, and then all at once I heard a cowbell, and I looked up and then I saw the shed approaching, it was being pulled by two donkeys, and one of them had a cowbell tied around its neck, and the shed was real big, and it was painted grey, and someone was sitting up front on top of it, someone all wrapped up in a blanket and driving the donkeys with a long stick, and then the shovel fell out of my hands, and I kept looking at that figure, there was a miner's safety helmet on his head, and even though I couldn't see his face, the way he sat there wasn't familiar at all, and then the shed came closer and closer, it drove onto the football field, and the driver's face still wasn't visible, and then I climbed out of the ditch and I stood there at the edge and waited, and I felt my legs shaking and my hands shaking, too, and then the man yanked at the reins and the donkeys stopped, and he jumped off the driver's seat, I could see only his back, but the way he now moved really did seem like how my father moved, the way he held his head, I mean, and by then everyone was looking at me, the workers and everyone else, too, and I took a step toward the driver, and then all at once he turned toward me and looked right at me, and he threw the blanket off him, and then I saw his face, it was nothing but pockmarks, you couldn't make out his features at all, because the pockmarks were real deep and flowed together, besides, they were spread thick with some kind of whitish cream, and on account of that his whole face had this greasy glitter, and when he saw that I was looking at him, he smiled at me, and I wanted to look only at his eyes and at his mouth, and by then I knew that he wasn't my father, no, he wasn't my father, there was no way he could be my father, but I took a step toward him all the same, and my mouth opened all the same, and I said, Father! even though I knew it wasn't my dad I was looking at, yes, I knew that the workers had lied, but I said this all the same, and because I'd said it, for a moment I felt that maybe just maybe I was wrong, that this was my dad, after all, because he was still smiling at me, and that made me even more scared, yes, I felt a chill come over me, and then all at once everyone around me broke out laughing, Traján and Feri and the Prodán brothers and all the others, too, and even the pockmarked worker, who, I was now dead certain, was not my father, and as that shrill laughter encircled me from every direction, with one hand I reached inside my pocket and felt my father's picture, and I knew that I was about to cry, and I clenched my teeth and turned away, and I took off running toward our apartment block, and I could still hear them laughing at me, and I had no idea what I would say to Mother, I only ran and ran, and I thought, if only I would never reach home. ❧

Translated by Paul Olchváry

Gyula Csics

Notes to My Childhood Diary

Top Secret until I'm as old as Grandpa. That was one possible title for the diary. Apt enough, since I had rarely taken it out or looked at it after writing it. The classification was not given by the authorities, or the secret service, or my parents, but by me shortly after I finished writing. Not because I was afraid that I'd written something that wasn't true. Nor because I thought it might have hurt somebody's feelings. But in 1957, during the reprisals, it became clear that everything was going to be as it had been, and I feared that my childish prattle would get others into trouble. At the time I worried for my parents too. In my diary, I wrote the truth, and nothing but the truth, with a child's naivety, accepting everything. But during the time of reprisals, and even later, it was impossible to tell who would come under 'scrutiny' and why—just that somebody wasn't pleased about something. Apart from all that, I classified it out of concern for the diary itself. Concern for an important piece of my life, which I didn't want to lose, had it found its way into the wrong hands. I would have to destroy it to avoid any false or malicious interpretation.

The house we lived in at the time, number 10 Rökk Szilárd Street, is in central Budapest. The street was later renamed after Béla Somogyi, a prominent Social Democrat killed in 1920, during the White Terror. Even later, the stretch between Gutenberg Square and Krúdy Street was once again given the name of the lawyer who had left his entire estate to the city. My friend Jancsi Kovács was sorely disappointed that it was not his stretch of the street that had been so renamed.

Gyula Csics

is Chief Librarian of the Tatabánya County Library. In February 2004, after a public discussion on the 1956 Revolution at the library, he approached János M. Rainer, Director of the 1956 Institute, introduced himself and offered him the manuscript of the diary he kept in 1956–57, "in case it might be interesting." The original text, including its original documentation, is appearing in a full facsimile edition as we go to press.
The Hungarian Quarterly*'s presentation of the diary, in two parts, attempts to capture some of its flavour.*

Our house was not far from where Rákóczi Avenue and the Great Boulevard meet, at Blaha Lujza Square: there stood the National Theatre, the Corvin Department Store and the party daily *Szabad Nép* offices, with its printing house and distribution centre. From our house it took about ten to fifteen minutes to walk to the Hungarian Radio at the far end of Bródy Sándor Street, or to Corvin Close and the Kilián Barracks, legendary scenes of some fierce fighting, as well as to Köztársaság Square—all focal points in the Pest of the 1956 Revolution.

The house itself was poor enough, a typical Joseph Town tenement building, with the characteristic open corridors around the inner courtyard and stairways

Rákóczi Avenue. Photograph by Tibor Szentpétery.

at the front and back. The back stairway led up to the attic and down to the cellars. Wooden planking divided up the attic into drying rooms, which could be locked, and there were planks over the dirt floor leading to them. The cellars could also be reached from the front stairway. People stored their winter fuel in the bunkers there, but there was also a spacious room suitable for an air-raid shelter, which during the Cold War was considered indispensable (in fact regulations made it compulsory). It was there that the upstairs tenants proceeded whenever fighting flared up and they felt they shouldn't stay in their own flats. This happened frequently after the Russians marched in on 4 November.

There were two shops on the street front of the house. My uncle Góré had a small bar in one of them, with my mother at the till and helping out with the food and at the bar sometimes. The barman, Steve Szőke, lived on the second floor. The other shop was a grocer's, owned by the parents of my friend Jancsi Kovács, who also kept a diary. Both families lived on the ground floor, since these flats gave direct access to the shops.

The front stairway had a passage leading to my uncle's wine cellar, where he hid his large casks of wine. During the wave of nationalisation, it became clear that he could not avoid having his business nationalised, so he shut his restaurant down and moved the furnishings to his parents' home, thinking that at some point he might be able to open up again. Nothing came of this, of course. All the furnishings got spoilt in his parent's place and were only good for firewood. (Before that, I played many great games of button-football on the slate-covered tables.) The only way he could save his casks of wine was by having the entrance to this section of the cellar bricked up and stacking coal in front of it. It wasn't until the beginning of the sixties that he dared to open the wall to sell his old casks. Since he had once been a master cooper, he took the casks apart in the cellar and carried them up stave by stave, with me as one of his helpers. Up to this day I can't understand how he was able to get away with this at the time. Obviously there must have been a remnant of honour, or some feeling of solidarity among the people living there, or at least nobody envious or hostile enough to report him. However, he was always afraid of being dragged off to 60 Andrássy Avenue, the headquarters of the ÁVH, the secret police, or having to suffer some other retribution for trying to save what he had once owned. But the fact is that no one from the house reported on him.

There was also a garage in the courtyard, where someone kept a motorbike with a side-car, which he was always tinkering with. Next to the garage, there was no paving over quite a large area. We turned this plot of earth into a garden. Jancsi and I tended it together, planting it with all sorts of bushes and flowers we collected on the outings we made.

The house was not at the centre of fighting during the Revolution, but things were happening quite close to us. Not too much could be seen from the entrance door, or the windows. But when the sound of fighting subsided, or if we had to go and fetch bread or other provisions, I did my best to tag along with my father, mother or any other adult, so as to see what was going on not so far away. My father was happy to take me anywhere, except Köztársaság Square. What was going on there, he said categorically, was not for small boys.

The residents of the house were all ordinary people. There were labourers among them, shop assistants, some who had fallen on hard times, and of the young lodgers, some ambitious country folk. These lived in the one- or two-room flats with doors onto the open corridors, or else in the single-room 'flats' that had been offices prior to the Second World War. These, just as in most tenement buildings in Pest, did not have their own toilets but shared common toilets, one on every floor. The larger, more comfortable, street-front flats were occupied by families, many of whom had 'seen better days' but were now at most lower middle class.

What I have written in the diary probably reflects the judgment of this house. A twelve-year-old mind could only sense the pathos of the events and would not have been capable of forming an independent opinion. One thing is certain: what I had written was not influenced by later events, nor by the propaganda ham-

mering home that it was all a counter-revolution, harping on the unavoidable negative side of revolutions (book-burning, lynching, the humiliation of the innocent, etc.). Without exception, everyone in the house agreed that this was a justified, spontaneous revolution sparked by the abject situation people found themselves in and their general dissatisfaction and their hatred for the occupying Soviet forces.

The social standing of the residents was pretty mixed. It was by no means a group representative of Hungarian society as it was then, and I most often formed my perception of the events from their accounts, paying close attention to their words and then trying to piece together the course of events. I still believe that no one in the house took an active part in the Revolution, though some had been caught up here and there in certain situations. Witnessing what happened, they naturally described their experiences once back in the house. This is how information reached the community. All ears whenever the adults started talking, I sucked up all the news I heard.

I decided upon writing a diary on the 24th of October, 1956. I began writing in a school notebook, but after a few weeks I transcribed it, because I found the format too insignificant in comparison to the events. So I chose a sturdier and much larger notebook and framed every page in the national colours. I took up writing it, as I said in my diary, because I found out that my playmate, Jancsi Kovács, who was a year older than me, had begun writing one. We did everything together, talked about everything together, and planned and went off exploring the city together. I felt that the things happening at the time were very important, perhaps more important than anything else that would happen in my life, and that I must record them for posterity.

Apart from what the people in the house said, an important source of information were the many newspapers and fliers, hand distributed, thrown from planes or bought. I carefully filed them because I felt they were very valuable. I am surprised even today by how much I read at the time: newspapers, fliers and the usual books, of course. I kept every flier and newspaper, irrespective of who gave it to me or who was distributing it. Naturally, my twelve-year-old mind would not have been able to tell whether a particular flier came from the revolutionaries, from the old Communist authorities, or was propaganda by Kádár's new Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, or perhaps was the result of the Western capitalist powers' "aerial intrusion into our domestic affairs".

The radio was another important source of information for me, or rather for my parents. I just paid attention to what they were listening to, Radio Hungary for the most part, but Radio Free Europe was tuned in almost as often. Since I could not judge the accuracy of the news, I simply tried to record everything honestly. I can still hear the sound of Radio Free Europe today, including the jamming and the interference that, I felt, came exactly at those moments when the most vital information was broadcast. How desperately people expected help from the West, with

every passing day more and more desperately. It was forbidden to listen to Radio Free Europe both before and after the Revolution, and the station was continuously jammed.

Photograph by Tibor Szentpétery

Hungarian Free Radio, with the historic coat of arms.

The atmosphere of those days was very peculiar. No one had told me, or at least I cannot remember having been told, what you must not talk about in front of strangers or at school, and yet we were all exactly in the know. Even a twelve-year-old! This we must have learned in the fifties, during the Rákosi dictatorship. By 1956, even small children were clear about what things heard at home were not to be repeated elsewhere. Perhaps not every family listened to Radio Free Europe during the fifties and sixties, but the majority did try to get their bearings from it, or at least this was certainly true of the people we knew. Another thing that happened of its own accord (without any parental hints) was that instead of the new street names that had been given in the fifties, I used (wherever I knew them) the old names in my diary.

The other setting for the events I describe is my Grandma's home and its neighbourhood. The house was in Kőbánya, on the edge of the 10th district, close to the Rákos stream, on Rákosmező, at 58 Paprika Street, where she lived with her oldest son Franci. There were fruit trees around the house, my grandmother had a kitchen garden and grew lucerne for the pigs. She kept poultry in the courtyard, and sometimes rabbits, which helped a great deal in feeding the family. There were always a few pigs at the house, and when they farrowed, the piglets had to be registered. The piglets received licenses (or at least that is what they were called at home), and were checked upon once in a while. We killed one or two pigs every year, under my father's direction. We prepared small packages of the sausages and black puddings 'for tasting', as was the tradition, and it was usually me who delivered these to our friends, just as I describe in my diary.

There was a housing estate for employees of MÁV, the Hungarian State Railways, not far from our house, and I had a friend who lived there called Jóska. As in all of these residential estates built by the big companies, all kinds of people lived here, in different types of houses. Railway officials and engine-drivers lived here, as did simple pointsmen and ticket-collectors. What brought them together was where they worked: all of them for MÁV. There was a big football pitch alongside the

estate where we watched many games and on which we ourselves played a lot as well. We were always going over to the estate, because we only had a well at Grandma's, and if we needed tap-water for something or other, we brought it over in buckets or in small cans, and very often it was me who went to fetch the water.

It was not easy to get to Grandma's house from our place. It was the same distance from the 28 tram stop, or we had to take the train all the way to Rákosfalva. We went to church in Rákosfalva. That's where the nearest cinema was, but we went quite a few times to see films in the MÁV estate's House of Culture.

To move about between the two places that figure in my diary, we often used the rickety side-car combination that my mother's younger brother Gyula owned, although more often it was not in proper working order. I always enjoyed going on it even though I used to get frozen. Of course, we walked a great deal in those days. My father, who worked at a butcher's in Rákospalota, another suburb, frequently went on foot all the way from our place in the city centre before public transport got under way in the mornings, so he could sell meat to people who had gone without for so long.

My mother's family had come from the Burgenland, the Trianon Treaty had left part of the family in Austria, the other part in Hungary. Grandma and her family remained in Hungary, her younger brother in Austria, simply because they were living in neighbouring villages, one of which went to Hungary, the other to Austria. In the summer of 1956, many people took to the road, visiting their relations across the borders. This was the first time they had the opportunity to cross since the Communists had come to power. This was how Grandma managed to visit Austria. They let her across to see her younger brother, in view of her advanced age not long before the Revolution. Our relatives in Austria invited us to settle there for good, as many Hungarians were doing at the time. Everyone in the family finally decided to stay here, even though they had promised us houses to live in and full support. Support continued in the form of the parcels they sent, but Hungary remained our home.

My Grandma's neighbours were lower middle-class, too. Their thinking was the same as ours: they truly wished and expected the Revolution to succeed and bring changes, they hoped to see the Russians leave. All I sensed, or managed to glean from all of this, was that the occupying forces must leave, otherwise the country would not be free and independent. We had fought the Turks and the pro-Habsburg Labanc for independence, and we must fight against the Russians as well. That was how I saw it then.

The afterlife of the diary was also interesting. When I took it out of its hiding place, after the Russian army withdrew in 1990, I read it through a number of times. I was a little disappointed, because I could not find everything that I thought I had recorded, all the things that had affected me so much. One such memory is of walking with my mother down the left side of Rákóczi Avenue towards the Danube, and seeing a suitcase propped open in a smashed shop-window, with a sign on it saying, "We are collecting for the martyrs of the

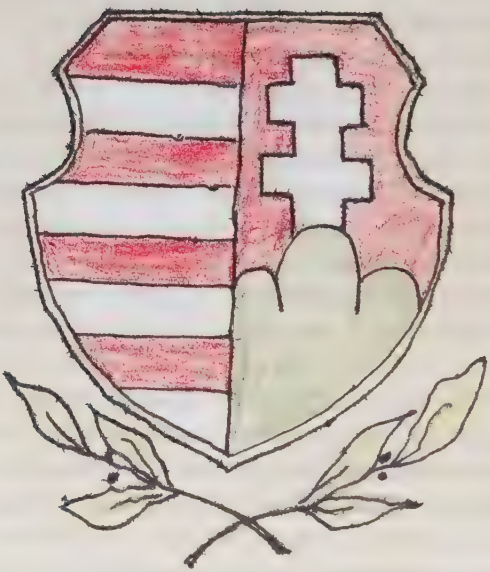
Revolution!" In the suitcase there was an amount of money that seemed beyond my imagination. Almost all paper money, when the smallest banknote at the time was a ten forint, and a kilo of bread and a litre of milk was three forints. No one dipped into it, they just added more. This moved me greatly.

I don't know why I did not write about the graves dug in the squares of the city. I had seen these on Rákóczi Square, Harminckettesek Square and Teleki Square. This is where they temporarily buried those who were killed in the streets, as they could not be taken to the cemeteries. The graves were marked with a cross, inscribed with whatever was known about whoever was lying there, or with an identity card simply tacked on. Sometimes all they wrote was "unknown Hungarian soldier", "unknown Hungarian civilian", "unknown Russian soldier" and so on. As life returned again, they were exhumed and taken to cemeteries. On All Souls' Day, the second of November, there were many candles lit on these graves as well, but there were flowers on them all the time.

When I 'declassified' my diary, after the changeover in 1990, its second life began. I had it copied to spare the original and lent the copy to anyone interested. This is when my family got to know about it. My younger sister though (who obviously figured in the diary), asked for a copy of her own, so that her own family could see what it was about. It was they who encouraged me to have it published as a book. I found it hard to imagine why it would be of interest to others. Who could be interested in the plainly written banal stories of a twelve year-old boy? But as more and more people read it, the more they said that it was indeed interesting.

In the meanwhile, it turned out that the diary of my friend, Jancsi Kovács, was either destroyed, or had been thrown out by his relations. I greatly regretted this, since keeping a diary was another thing we did together. I owe it to my friend to give an account of this: he has been living in a home for a long time now and can no longer grasp the outcome of our diary writing.

For over thirty years I kept my diary, neatly wrapped, labelled 'top secret', in a recess at the back of my writing desk. During that time I went through elementary school and secondary school, got into university and completed my degree. My first job was at a *gimnázium* in Budapest, then I went on to work in the technical library of the Tatabánya mines. I got married. My wife was the first to know about the diary after those who knew of it when I started it. We had children, they grew up and completed their education. They too only came to know of the diary when the Soviet troops, "temporarily stationed here", were withdrawn. At the age of twelve, I had vowed to continue writing my diary until Soviet troops had left the country. (No one at the time had thought we would have to wait another thirty-five years.) I wrote my last diary entry on 15 March 1957, and it was only after they left that I took the diary out of the drawer. ❧



Gyula Csics

Hungarian Revolution 1956

God Bless the Hungarians!

Tuesday, October 23, 1956

STUDENT PROTEST

In the morning Mum and I went to the cemetery. First we visited Grandpa Papp, then Grandpa Fabsics. Grandpa Fabsics's grave was really dry, so we watered it. Then we came home, and I did my homework and played the violin.

I had to be in school by 1 p.m. The first class—singing class—was cancelled because the teacher had something to do. I used the time to run home and get Mum to sign the tests I did in Russian class. In the classroom, István Pinke told stories.

In the second class the geography compositions were handed back, and the ones with the best grades—mine was a four/five[1]*—read them out loud. In Russian class I was also called on to read my work, which got a 5. We spent all of geometry class and Hungarian class answering questions the teachers threw at us. Afterward we had a class assembly with our form-master. We arranged who sits where in the classroom.*

I went home at 6.15. Till then I didn't hear or see a thing. When I got home, Kati said that people are demonstrating. I hadn't heard a thing about all this. It was only yesterday that the radio announced that students were protesting in Szeged and that there was an uprising in Poland. Góré was reading a Free Youth *flyer. I read it, too. It was about the student protest. When I went out, I saw three big trucks at the Corvin Department Store carrying university students. A boy was standing on top of the cab and along with the others was yelling: "Russkies go home! We've had enough of Rákosi!*[2] *No more waiting even an hour, we want*

1 ■ Up to this day, the Hungarian educational system uses a five-point marking scale to evaluate students' achievement, with 1 as the lowest and 5 as the highest mark awarded. [All the notes for this English version have been appended by Gyula Csics.]

2 ■ Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971), Hungarian Communist politician. Secretary General of the Hungarian Communist Party after 1945, then, following the forced merger in 1948 of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party with the Communist Party, Secretary General of the Hungarian Workers' Party thus established. An orthodox Moscow loyalist, he was the inititiator of Hungary's own show trials and played a crucial role in other illegal Communist practices. On account of his dictatorial and Stalinist methods, he was removed from his post in July 1956, but was forced to go to Moscow with impunity.

Imre Nagy[3] *in power!" Later I walked with Maja to chatechism class, she didn't dare go alone. On the way home we met a crowd of demonstrators that stopped at Népszínház Street and sang the National Anthem. All the while Góré was at Radio headquarters. I went to bed at 9. From bed I heard the crowd shouting: "Let's pull down the Stalin statue! Down with Gerő!"*[4]

Wednesday, October 24, 1956

THE REVOLUTION ERUPTS

I was up by 6 a.m. I woke to the crackling and rattling of gunfire. I got out of bed and dressed in no time, then ran down to the street. The fog was thick, I couldn't see even as far as Gutenberg Square. Lots of folks were saying it was artificial fog. I couldn't see, but I could hear the crackle of gunfire from Gutenberg Square. In the doorway to our apartment building Mari said no one on the upper floors slept at night, because all the windows at the newspaper Free People[5] *had been broken and two cars had been set on fire, in a word, they made one big mess. The bricklayers who were repairing our building came in, too, including Ilmaros, who said he hadn't slept all night and that he'd been here on Békés Street. He said the whole street had been dark, and that the students had been fighting it out something awful with the secret police by the wall. Then I went to Jancsi's place. He had a whole bunch of flyers, and he gave me one. And he said that a teacher, Mr Moór,*

3 ■ Imre Nagy (1896–1958), Hungarian Communist politician. He lived in exile in the Soviet Union between 1920 and 1945. As Minister of Agriculture, he devised and implemented the land reform and the redistribution of land after 1945. He turned into an opponent of Mátyás Rákosi mainly because of the latter's policy of forced collectivization. As prime minister between 1953 and 1955, he brought to an end deportations and forced resettlements, which made him widely popular. Due to the revolutionary mood and popular demand, he became prime minister again on 24 October 1956. He disbanded the ÁVH, the political police, and on 31 November announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. He also accepted that the country should return to multi-party democracy. Upon the invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops, Nagy fled to the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest. He was lured out of there by the Russians on November 23 and deported to Romania. In 1958, he was tried on trumped-up charges and sentenced to death for initiating and leading an organized attempt to overthrow the regime and for treason. He was executed along with his associates and buried in an unmarked grave. In 1989, he was rehabilitated, his remains exhumed and reburied in a solemn, massively attended, public funeral.

4 ■ Ernő Gerő (1898–1980), Hungarian Communist politician, one of the closest associates of Mátyás Rákosi, along with whom and Mihály Farkas he formed the "troika" that bore the largest share of responsibility for the illegal abuses of power of the era. He had returned to Hungary from Moscow in 1945 with other Communist emigre leaders and was responsible for the country's economy after the Communist takeover in 1948. Following Rákosi's removal from office, he filled the position of First Secretary of the Communist Party from June to October 1956. He fled to Moscow during the Revolution, where he lived until 1960. After his return to Hungary in 1962, he was called to account for violations of the law and expelled from the Party, but was never brought to court to face charges.

5 ■ *Szabad Nép* (Free People) was the daily of the Hungarian Workers' Party. It ceased publication in 1956 and was replaced by *Népszabadság*, still extant the daily of the newly established Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

had read out the 14 demands.[6] *I wrote them down, too, well, as many as I could, seeing how Jancsi didn't have all of them.*

1 .....
2 *A new government led by Imre Nagy*
3 *Russian–Yugoslav relations*[7]
No more jamming of radio broadcasts
Freedom of the press
New uniforms for our armed forces
Completely open proceedings in the case of M. Farkas[8]
Reinstate the old Kossuth coat of arms
Complete freedom of speech and of the press
Pull down the Stalin statue
Total solidarity among ourselves

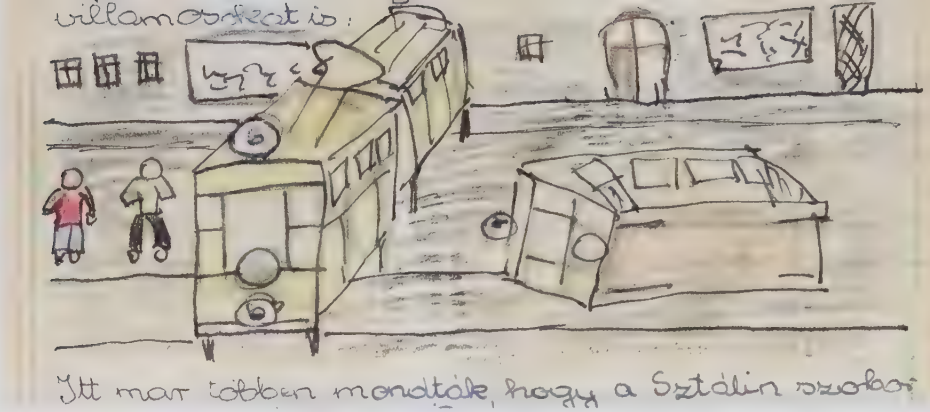
There were six policemen over at Jancsi and his folk's place, who fled there in the night to escape the revolutionaries. The government didn't trust even the cops, seeing how they'd been sent out to defend the Free People *with guns but no cartridges. By ten o'clock the fog had lifted enough for me to see that the revolutionaries out there on the street were already carrying guns.*

Mrs Kovács told my mum that Jancsi was writing a diary. So I started keeping one too. Later Mr Bicskei told us what happened yesterday. He said the crowd had demanded that the fourteen demands be printed in the newspaper. The newspaper reporters agreed to this, but then the crowd wanted to have them read out on the radio too. The party secretary told them to go right ahead. But the secret police wouldn't let them in the building. A tank colonel then asked the secret police to let them in. The secret police shot the colonel. The tank crews then chased the secret police right up to the attic. The people brought the colonel to Free People *and put him on the party secretary's table. Then Mr Radics came by our place, and he said all the books in* Free People*'s bookstore were being thrown out and burned. From our building's doorway I could just see that ten Russian tanks wanted to go to the radio station, but the crowd pushed over a number six tram right in their way. Then I went with Mum to see what was happening on the Great Boulevard. The books in*

6 ■ The diarist probably means the Sixteen Points, a set of demands composed by students' organizations a couple of days before 23 October, widely accepted as a kind of program for the Revolution.

7 ■ After Stalin fell out with Marshal Tito in 1948, Yugoslavia was treated by the rest of the Communist bloc as an arch-enemy, "a lackey of the US and the imperialists". Because of its independence from Moscow it served as a kind of model for many of the Hungarian revolutionaries. It was a crucial demand that Hungary's relations with Yugoslavia be normalized and brought on a par with those tying the country to the Soviet Union.

8 ■ Mihály Farkas (1904–1965), Communist politician, the third member of the Muscovite "troika" of Party leaders, was Defence Minister between 1948 and 1953. He was charged and sentenced to prison in 1956 as one of the main instigators of the show trials and for other illegal practices. He was released in 1961.



the Spark[9] *were on fire. I felt sorry for all those good books, but everyone was saying let them burn. Liptai, who lives here in the passageway to our building's other entrance and also goes to the Kígyósi music school*[10]*, even stole two books. And we saw the overturned trams, too.*

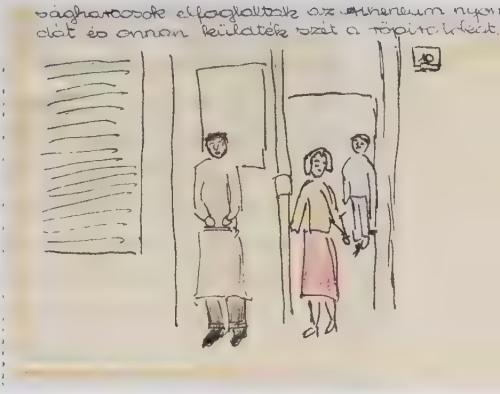
Lots of people around here were saying that the Stalin statue was now here at the corner of the Great Boulevard and Rákóczi Avenue. Then, since the tanks weren't able to go along the Boulevard, they came up our street, but they got shot at, which holed an oil tank, and the street got all oily.

At noon Ványi's tenant came home and said there had been big battles around Üllői Road and Baross Street, and that the power lines were down and two power poles were knocked down, too, plus two Russian tanks were on fire. After lunch 80 tanks went all the way down Akácfa Street. Auntie Árvai went out for bread, and to stay out of trouble she went toward Teleki Square. Well, even around there, she said, there were two shot-up Russian tanks. In the afternoon I went over to Jancsi's

9 ■ The bookshop on the ground floor of the building housing the journal *Szikra* (Spark) was also called Szikra. Gyula Csics spent a lot of time in this shop in his childhood looking at the books and he bought almost all his books in the same shop.

10 ■ "Kigyósi" was the name of the music school on the corner of Baross Street and the Great Boulevard, which the diarist attended for violin lessons.

place to play, but we could still hear shooting. Meanwhile Imre Nagy became prime minister, and he declared that anyone with a gun in their hands would be brought before a court martial. But the Central Leadership in their session in the evening didn't dismiss Ernő Gerő from the secretariat, and that was oil on the fire. On account of this, the fighting didn't end. At noon the radio announced that there would be an amnesty for those who lay down their arms by 2 p.m. Then they extended that to 6 p.m. The freedom fighters occupied the Athæneum printing press and they distributed their leaflets from there.



Thursday, October 25, 1956

GERŐ IS REMOVED FROM THE SECRETARIAT

I got up at 8 in the morning. After breakfast I went over to Jancsi's. All morning we played records. We went through almost every one—including the banned Kossuth and Transylvanian marches. Jancsi's parents had already left for work. Cannons were blasting all day. Around 10 Maja came over and we played with her, too. At 1 we were home for lunch. Mum told us to go to the small room, seeing how the pressure from the blasts could break windows. We spent the afternoon in the small room drawing our Cities[11]*. The Radio announced in the afternoon that Ernő Gerő had been dismissed from his position and that János Kádár*[12] *was secretary in his place. Afterwards people put the Hungarian flag out on all buildings, but without the crest in the middle, since the youth demanded the banning of the Constitutional*

11 ■ The diarist and his friend, János Kovacs, were each engaged in drawing up the map of a city existing in their imagination only. The streets were given names by them too. Gyula Csics's "City" was called Hunyad, and bore a close resemblence to Budapest, with a river flowing through its centre, as well as an island quite similar to Margaret Island. The streets were named after his friends and classmates or with the headwords of the encyclopaedia mentioned in the text. Some of the streets carried the names of events and characters associated with the Revolution, thus Revolution Street or Maléter Street, etc.

12 ■ János Kádár, Communist politician (1912–1989) active in the Communist movement since 1931 and imprisoned several times during the Horthy years. In 1951, he was arrested and sentenced to life on trumped up charges but rehabilitated in 1954. In 1956, he was included once again in the leadership of the Communist Party. On November 1, 1956, he travelled to Moscow, where he was handpicked by the Russian leadership to become Hungary's new leader. Returning along with the Soviet intervention forces, he formed the "Revolutionary Government of Workers and Peasants" and became one of the founders of the MDP, the successor of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) and its leader until his replacement in 1988. Breaking his promise, he launched a bloody campaign of retaliations and bore heavy responsibility for the terror that followed 1956, which from the mid-1960s on gave way to a "soft dictatorship". By the 1970s, Kádar's regime had gained acceptance even in the West. The 1960s and 70s saw an improvement in living standards, but the continuous borrowing from abroad eventually brought Hungary into a profound monetary crisis.

crest and the removal of the star. That is why the flags on every building had holes cut into their centres.[13]

Later they put out black flags too. That night, Jancsi's mother said there'd been a huge battle by Parliament and that they'd been in the shelter all the while. There was a curfew after 6 p.m. The men were talking in the building doorway, and I went over and listened to what they were saying. Mrs Verebes's tenant, Kókai, who's 19, said they were at People's Army Square on their way toward Parliament on a Russian tank when a volley was fired at them, and people just plopped off the tank, like that, he happened to be holding the flag, a bullet knocked the flag right out of his hand and he fell, too, but onto the tank. The bullets were bouncing onto him off the side of the tank, but only his knee got hurt. Then he really did fall off the tank. It was lucky he escaped. A lot of people were saying that the Russian tank had taken them into the firing on purpose. At 6 p.m. they had to close the doorway. At night Góré came by with two leaflets. One was about the university students' four latest demands, and the other announced the new positions for J. Kádár and I. Nagy.

Friday, October 26, 1956

CALL FOR THE SECRET POLICE TO LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS—BATTLE ON THE BOULEVARD

In the morning I was reading in bed, then Mum and I went down to the Great Boulevard to see if there was any sort of food. That's the first time I saw the Stalin statue. On the side were the words MAIL ROBBER, and on its collar tab it said PIMP. Two dead Russians were lying in front of the Keszelyi restaurant and an armoured car was burning. Russian tanks were moving all over the place. The books were still smoking away in front of the Spark. Jancsi said there'd been a big battle at night near the Western Railway Station. The Radio was lying away, because it said that the "counter-revolutionaries" had surrendered and had control of only three strategic locations, which isn't true, of course. The government decreed that anyone who lays down their arms by 10 p.m. gets an amnesty. In the morning Jancsi and I worked on drawing our cities again. To get food for our building, Dad went out with Mr Felber and got meat and pastries from the cold buffet kitchen. Great blasts were going off as he passed the food out to the people in our building. Meantime a big battle was going on out on the Great Boulevard. The windows all broke and couches and curtains hung out of them. 21 Rökk Szilárd Street got a direct hit. The Discount department store caught fire, and so did the buildings across from the Technology College and the Baross Street clinic. The Writers' Union issued 6 new demands. More newspapers were printed today. At night 800 people

13 ■ The removal of the hated Communist symbols, the hammer and sickle and the red star, from the national flag was another of the most important revolutionary demands. The red-white-and-green Hungarian banner with a hole in the middle has been a symbol of the 1956 Revolution ever since.

laid down their arms, but two-thirds of the insurgents were still fighting. The youth demanded that the secret police lay down their arms. Mortars exploded at night.

Saturday, October 27, 1956

THE GOVERNMENT FORMS

Today Jancsi and I spent all day drawing our cities, the sound of firing wasn't so bad anymore. Aeroplanes were dropping leaflets in the morning, but all of them fell on top of the Corvin. The new government was formed by noon.

Prime Minister	*Imre Nagy*
Deputy Prime Ministers	*Antal Apró,*
	József Bognár, Ferenc Erdei
Minister of the Interior	*Ferenc Münich*
Minister of Defence	*Károly Janza*
Minister of Finance	*István Kósa*
Minister of Justice	*Dr Erik Molnár*
Minister for Foundry and Engineering	*János Csergő*
Minister of Mining and Energy	*Sándor Czottner*
Minister of Light Industry	*Mrs József Nagy*
Minister of Urban and	
Local Administration	*Ferenc Nezvál*
Minister of Agriculture	*Béla Kovács (former Secretary of*
	the Independent Smallholders' Party)
Minister for the State Economy	*Miklós Ribjánszky*
Minister of Foreign Trade	*József Bognár*
Minister of Internal Trade	*János Tausz*
Minister for the Food Industry	*Rezső Nyers*
Minister for Produce Delivery	*Antal Gyenes*
Minister for Construction	*Antal Apró*
Minister for Transportation	*Lajos Bebrics*
Minister of Culture	*György Lukács*
Minister of Education	*Albert Kónya*
Minister of Health	*Antal Babics*
Director of the National Planning Office	*Árpád Kiss*

Sunday, October 28, 1956

SPEECH BY IMRE NAGY

In the morning I read a lot of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. *Gyula walked over to Grandma's place. A bit later in the morning I went over to Jancsi's. There I worked on drawing the City. I went home at 10. Franci was already there. He said that around Grandma's nothing had happened at all. Then Uncle Géza, Dad's uncle, came by from across the Danube over in Buda. He said he'd been stopped and asked for his ID six times on his way here.* Free People *appeared in the morning and printed the names of the members of the new government. Gyula arrived after lunch and said that around 800 tanks and 250 trucks full of ammunition were coming toward the city. A ceasefire was called for noon, but the shooting went on all the same. The Radio tried everything that it hadn't under Rákosi. For example, the noon Angelus bell. Mr Kolics was over at our place, and he said that yesterday a siege of the György Kilián (Mária Terézia) army barracks got underway, and that it was still going on. He also said that the buildings on Práter Street nearby were damaged, too. In the afternoon I went over to Jancsi's, where we worked on the City again (see Box[14]). I named a street and a square after the Revolution. In the evening Prime Minister Imre Nagy gave a speech. In it he promised that the secret police would be disbanded and that March 15 would be a national holiday again. He also promised that, just like the youth demanded, our homeland's coat of arms would once again be the Kossuth coat of arms and that Russian forces would begin withdrawing within 24 hours.*

Monday, October 29, 1956

THE KOSSUTH COAT OF ARMS AGAIN

This morning I was reading again, and I finished Tom Sawyer, Detective. *Mum and Dad left for Rákospalota by 6 a.m. After breakfast I went over to Jancsi's. I took the encyclopædia published by the newspaper* Pest News, *and we used it to name the City's streets. Around noon we heard shouting. We looked outside and saw that a big crowd by the National Theatre was shouting, "Russkies go home!" In the afternoon I was at Jancsi's again. In the evening Ványi's tenant, Jancsi, said that the university students wanted the defender of the Kilián barracks, Pál Maléter,[15] to be minister of defence.*

14 ■ The "Box" was where the diarist collected the bric-à brac associated with the Revolution (shell fragments, cartridges, buttons) which he could not paste into the diary on account of their size but which formed part of the narrative of the Revolution for him.

15 ■ Pál Maléter (1917–1958), a senior Hungarian army officer who went over to the side of the revolutionaries. He agreed to a ceasefire with the rebel fighters in one of the centres of the fighting,

PARTY HEADQUARTERS UNDER SIEGE

Early in the morning I was reading Please, Sir![16] *Later I was at Jancsi's. By now we were working in the big room. The weather was beautiful. Jancsi and I were busy writing in our diaries. There were lots of aeroplanes flying around. They were scattering leaflets but we were out of luck: they all fell on top of the Corvin Department Store. A new daily newspaper,* Independence[17]*, appeared today for the first time. There was no shooting in the morning, but they made up for it in the afternoon with great big bursts of fire. Later I found out that they were shooting at Party headquarters, which is on Tisza Kálmán Square*[18]*. Dad later went to see for himself what was up. On getting home he told us that the insurgents had lynched two secret policemen, hanging them from their feet on a tree. One was in a police uniform, the other had on the uniform of an armoured forces colonel. Both had been drunk, walking along with wine bottles in their hands and singing away when they were caught by the university students. Both had the traditional rosettes with the national colours pinned on themselves to fool the insurgents, because the insurgents were chasing down secret policemen. But the students couldn't catch all the secret police, on account of them escaping into the two-storey deep cellar. Well, the students let water into the cellar, but it didn't do any good, because as it later turned out, that cellar is connected to the nearby underground line. Mr Kolics, who lives on Práter Street, was still here today. He said their neighbourhood really got torn apart, since they're right across the street from that school that's all full of insurgents, which is why the Russians are firing at that, too. But even in the school, the insurgents encountered secret police, why, they*

the neighbourhood around the Kilián Barracks, and took control of the whole neighbourhood. Imre Nagy appointed him Minister of Defence in his cabinet. In November 1956, the Russians, pretending to start negotiations, trapped and seized him. He was sentenced to death and executed for his part in the Revolution. He was rehabilitated in 1989.

16 ■ *Tanár úr kérem* (Please, Sir), is a collection of brilliant, hilariously funny satirical sketches on *gimnázium* life, first published in 1916 but highly popular to this day, by the Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy (1887–1938).

17 ■ With the lifting of censorship, newspapers began to proliferate in the first days of the revolt. *Függetlenség* (Independence), however, stood out: it was launched by one of the first and best known fighting leaders of the Revolution, József Dudás, a pre-war Communist in Transylvania and a political prisoner after the Communist takeover in Hungary, who occupied the headquarters and printing house of the former Communist Party newspaper with his group of freedom fighters on 28 October.

18 ■ The siege of the Communist Party headquarters in Köztársaság (formerly called Tisza Kálmán) Square on October 30 was one of the most notorious and bloody events of the Revolution. Tragic mistakes were made both by the defenders and the revolutionary groups surrounding the building amidst wild rumours in circulation for days about torture chambers hidden below the building. After shooting broke out, the doors were broken down and the mob went on a rampage of pillaging and lynching. Many of the victims were totally innocent, and the gruesome images published in the world press were later used by the authorities to point at the vile inhumanity of the revolutionaries and justify the severe retributions following the Revolution.

even found a secret transmitter and a secret police uniform. At night the radio announced that the Home Guard had been formed and that Cardinal Mindszenthy had been freed.[19]

Wednesday, October 31

THE RUSSIANS BEGIN WITHDRAWING—A LITTLE WALK

Today I woke up at 7. I read The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. *Góré had already gone for a walk. On getting home he said there were lots of dead secret policemen by Party headquarters. The secret police had been really cruel, so everyone who goes by there gives one of them at least one good kick. Which is why many have their brains or guts spilled out. I wanted to go out for a walk at 9 with Dad. Well, we got only as far as the doorway when we were told that the Palace Hotel was still crawling with secret police. Just then a car went by with its siren blasting. There was the national flag in one window, and a light machine gun in the other. Everyone was saying that it was headed for the Palace Hotel. Then we headed off. From Gutenberg Square we could see where the building at 21 Rökk Szilárd Street had got hit. Afterward we went to the Great Boulevard and something had really been happening there! Until now we'd figured the big mess was around our street, when our building hadn't been hit once, whereas out there on the Boulevard every building had an average of three holes in it. As we walked along, the buildings were more and more full of holes and where it intersected with Baross Street, the Boulevard was littered with dead Russians. We couldn't even get beyond Pál Street, no, there was an awful lot of rubble and burnt-out tanks over there, tanks the insurgents had exploded using Molotov cocktails. From there we could see the Kilián barracks, where all three floors had been torn right off at one corner. We walked to the Radio building along Mária Street and Bródy S. Street. There wasn't a shred of plaster on this building, and every window was broken. A sign above the main entrance read, RADIO FREE KOSSUTH! Just then a secret policeman was being brought out of the building. I didn't see him, but Mum said he was pale as a ghost. From there we went along Puskin Street to Rákóczi Avenue. Here, members of the Home Guard were on patrol. Everywhere there were signs saying, "FREE*

19 ■ Joseph Cardinal Mindszenthy (1892–1975) was Hungary's Roman Catholic Primate. A conservative churchman, he had been arrested because of his protests during the Arrow Cross terror in 1944, and due to his opposition to "democratic reforms" including the nationalization of Catholic schools and Church property, by the Communists in 1948. He was sentenced to life imprisonment but allowed to live under house arrest later on. On 31 October 1956 he was freed by Hungarian soldiers and brought to Budapest. On November 3, he made a radio speech calling Imre Nagy's post-Communist government illegitimate and hinting at the reversal of the land reform. (That speech came to be widely regarded later on as having provided the ultimate pretext for the Russian intervention.) After the return of Russian forces, Mindszenthy asked for asylum at the US Legation in Budapest, where he stayed for fifteen years. He was allowed to leave the country in 1971 and settled in Vienna.

MINDSZENTHY! RUSSKIES GO HOME!" Русские домой! *Then we went home. Mum and I went to the market on Klauzál Square. On the way back we saw that Joe*[20] *was still getting a good beating. In the afternoon I was with Jancsi. In the evening, the Radio announced that the Russian forces were about to begin withdrawing.*

Thursday, November 1, 1956

ALL SOULS' DAY—MINDSZENTHY ON THE RADIO

In the morning I read. Later on, Mum told me that Gyula left a message saying that I should go over to Auntie Bözsi, because she's sick. First I went to Jancsi's for half an hour, and only then did I go to Auntie Bözsi. I made her some tea and then went home, but Auntie Bözsi said I should come back in the afternoon, which is why when I did return, I brought my diary and my notebook. In the afternoon I did some drawing. Candles were burning in people's windows in the evening, both in memory of those who'd died in the fighting for freedom and on account of it being All Souls' Day. The Radio announced that more Russian troops had arrived in Hungary. Imre Nagy protested. The radio also said that the papers Evening Budapest *and* Free People *would be replaced by* News *and* Free World. *At night Hungary officially declared its neutrality and Minszenthy gave a speech.*

Friday, November 2, 1956

THE RUSSIANS SURROUND HUNGARY'S AIRPORTS

In the morning I stayed in bed a long time. A bit later, I drew in my notebook, and I wanted to go to Auntie Bözsi and stop on the way to pick up her pay for her, but there were too many people in the queue. By noon I was back home. After lunch I did more drawing in my notebook. The Radio announced in the afternoon that the Russians are surrounding the airports and a few hospitals, too. The Russians said they were doing this because if the insurgents attack the Russians who are heading toward the Soviet Union, well then they'd blow the airports to smithereens. They didn't even let aeroplanes take off. I went to bed around 8 p.m. Mum and Dad came over, too, so five of us ended up sharing two beds.

20 ■ "Jóska", the mocking name given to Stalin.

Saturday, November 3, 1956

ARCHBISHOP MINDSZENTHY SPEAKS— A NEW GOVERNMENT

In the morning I wrote my diary, because I was really behind. Later I drew in my notebook. Today's newspapers announced that things will be completely back to normal as of Monday. School will resume and, where possible, public transport will start up again. In the factories, work is already underway.

That night I went over to Auntie Bözsi's to sleep there, so she wouldn't be by herself. On the way I bought a copy of Truth, *which I read before going to sleep. This newspaper said that the government had finally been formed, and that it included Pál Maléter, the heroic commander of the Kilián barracks, plus Anna Kéthly*[21]*, who has travelled to Vienna.*

Sunday, November 4, 1956

THE RUSSIANS ATTACK OUR HOMELAND

I woke around 6 a.m. and heard shots being fired, and I said, "What's this, they're shooting again?" Auntie Bözsi turned on the radio, which was just then broadcasting a speech by Imre Nagy that went something like this: "Early this morning Soviet forces began an attack against our capital, obviously with the aim of toppling the people's government. Our forces are waging battle." Then the radio played the National Anthem, and then it repeated all this in German, French, and English along with the National Anthem again and a recital of the Summons. *Then Imre Nagy called on Pál Maléter and István Kovács*[22] *to report to Parliament immediately from the Russian barracks they happened to be in at the time. Then we went over to the Szabadoses while the building's other residents all went down to the shelter. There we kept listening to the radio, which fell silent at 9.14 a.m., but*

21 ■ Anna Kéthly (1889–1976), Hungarian Social Democratic politician, a leader of the Social Democratic women's movement. In 1948 she was expelled from the Party because she opposed its merger with the Communists. She was imprisoned on trumped-up charges in 1949 and released from prison in 1954. In 1956 she took part in the reorganization of the Social Democratic Party and became a Minister of State in Imre Nagy's government. After the Revolution she went into exile in Belgium.

22 ■ Istvan Kovács (1917–2000), a major general and Chief of Operations at the Defence Ministry in 1956, then Chief of Staff after 31 October. He was a member of the delegation negotiating the withdrawal of troops with the Russians from 2 November. He was seized by the KGB along with his associates. He was sentenced to six years in 1958 and amnestied in 1961. He worked as a menial worker after his release, and later as a translator until his death.

we kept the set on all the same, and all of a sudden we heard Radio Free Europe, which announced that the Russians had captured Imre Nagy's government. In the morning I did some drawing in my notebook. Auntie Bözsi telephoned Auntie Cselényi, who lived out in Kőbánya. Auntie Cselényi said there were Russians there already, too. Around noon I went home, with Auntie Bözsi and this boy going along with me. On the way I saw that Klauzál Street and Akácfa Street were all barricaded, and that another barricade was going up between the National Theatre and the Keszelyi restaurant. Auntie Bözsi said there would no doubt be a battle here. From the Corvin I went the rest of the way alone, and I saw that the Corvin was full of ammunition and that there were people with rifles in Free People. *Back at our building, everyone living above the ground floor went down to the cellar. I spent some time in the afternoon arranging my books.*

Monday, November 5, 1956 and Tuesday, November 6, 1956

THE KÁDÁR GOVERNMENT FORMS— GUN BATTLE AT THE SPARK

This morning, the battle raged. We turned on the radio, which was broadcasting again. They said Soviet troops had not come to conquer our homeland but to fight the counter-revolution, which Imre Nagy's government didn't want to take on. They also said that Imre Nagy's government was finished, and that a new government had been formed under János Kádár. I stayed in bed a long time. Mr Felber came down around 10. He, too, said that a new government had been formed to replace Imre Nagy's, and that it was called the revolutionary worker-peasant government. He added that the Russians will have to leave even if they win. Around noon a big battle got underway at the Free People *headquarters. I spent the afternoon arranging my books. At night the Felbers slept at our place, since sleeping on the second floor would have been dangerous, and Mr Felber didn't want to go to the cellar.*

* * * *

The battle continued the next morning. There was much shooting at the Spark. The Russian tanks were firing away and they were using mortars, too. All the same, the Dohány Street bakery was still selling bread. A young man wanted to leave the building across the street to go and get bread, but the Russians shot him in the leg. He began shouting, "Oh, oh, help me!" Some people wanted to drag him into a nearby garage, but the Russians then shot him once and for all. The cannons, tanks and mortars fired away all day long. When a mortar shell fell in front of the school, even the residents who were in the cellar got scared. All the school's windows broke. Today, even the building across the street from us, number 5, was hit. (See Box.)

Wednesday, November 7, 1956

THE MOST HORRIBLE DAY OF THE SIEGE— THE QUALITY DEPARTMENT STORE CATCHES FIRE

Today would have been my twelfth birthday celebration. But there was none, because the shooting was still going on even today—not as much as yesterday, but we could hear it from even further off. Since the Russians had left the National Theatre, the insurgents got a big ball from inside the Corvin and began playing football. They stopped playing when the Russians came again, and Uncle Leitgéb asked them for the ball. They gave it to him, and Uncle Leitgéb gave it to us. When I went over to Jancsi's place everyone there was still asleep. I noticed that they'd opened all their windows so that the air pressure wouldn't break them. Hardly had I got across the street when six tanks passed by. One of them stopped in front of our building and opened fire. Several of the building's windows broke. A huge battle began in the afternoon. The cannons never stopped blasting away. All at once a rumour spread among the building's residents that the Corvin was on fire. In no time every pail and wash-tub was filled with water, so that if the fire were to spread to our building, we could put it out quickly. When I looked out of the doorway I saw huge billows of smoke. Later on we found out that it wasn't the Corvin that was on fire, but the Quality Department Store. Even with all that shooting, in the afternoon I made flags. At night a rumour spread that the Fashion Hall was on fire too.

Thursday, November 8, 1956

AFTER THE SIEGE

The night passed calmly. Only the occasional, muffled shots could be heard from afar. The Felbers woke earlier than us today. When we got up, Uncle Felber said the insurgents had left Free People, *and that the people were looting. A lot of people from our building took something or other. Jancsi and I went out to the doorway. We saw that Russian patrols were coming and that they were heading into the Corvin. After a little while they came out with a lot of guns, and they took the cartridges out and put them in a heap. Then we were chased inside, because tanks were approaching. We kept wondering what we could play. All of a sudden I told Jancsi to get the ball, and Jancsi went inside and got it. For a long time we played football. Jancsi wanted to give the ball a really good kick, and his shoe came right off. The tanks came down the road. Then I went to Jancsi's place, and we looked through old copies of* Peace & Freedom. *In the afternoon a Russian soldier came into our building. He looked around for weapons. At the Zoltánis' place, Uncle Zoltáni's son-in-law knew Russian and could talk with him. The Russian soldier said he hadn't been at his parents' for eleven years and hadn't slept for three days. I got to sleep really late. Six mortar shells exploded at night.*

Friday, November 9, 1956

A LITTLE WALK

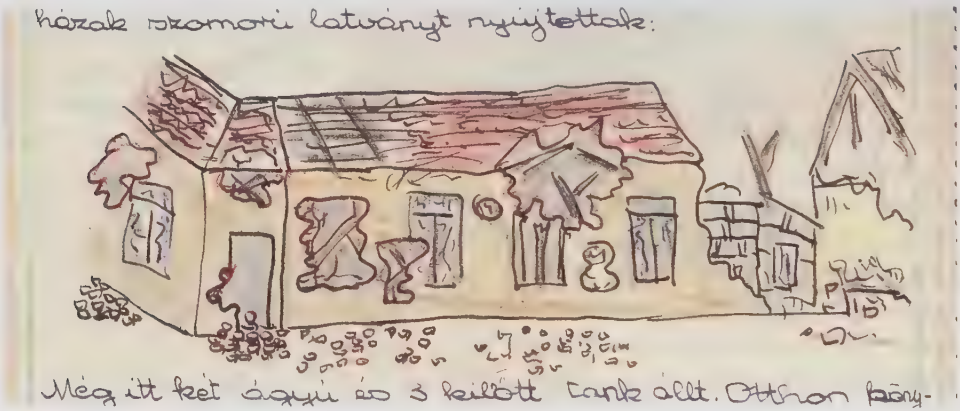
In the morning I read. In the afternoon Mum and I went to Auntie Bözsi's. When we got out to Rákóczi Avenue, the scene was really pitiful: riddled buildings, whole floors torn off, power lines ripped off. The steeple of the St Roch Chapel had collapsed. Even the Red Cross flag on the second floor didn't keep the St Roch Hospital from getting hit five times. The second floor of the Quality Department Store was all burnt out. On the way back, we went along Wesselényi Street and the Boulevard. We checked to see if anything bad had happened to Auntie Vali's building. The furniture store at the corner of Wesselényi Street had burnt out. The building at number 4, along the Erzsébet Boulevard stretch of the Great Boulevard, had collapsed.

The tower of the New York Palace, which had recently been repaired (over three years), had collapsed. The building housing the day-and-night food shop really got knocked around. The building with the all-night pharmacy in it had its roof right off. The National Theatre got away with only a little damage. Before long we went home.

Saturday, November 10, 1956 and Sunday, November 11, 1956

AT GRANDMA'S FOR THE FIRST TIME

In the morning, I read. Around 11, Gyula and Uncle Cselényi arrived from Grandma's. After lunch I went with Gyula to Grandma's. We walked along the number 26 tram route, along Népszínház Street, where there's a power line down and a couple of places that got shot up. One booth on Teleki Square is gutted by fire and two more are all shot up. The buildings on the side of Dobozi Street that faces Teleki Square are badly damaged. At the Agricultural Exhibition we left the tram route and continued along the other half of Kolozsvári Street toward the Kőbányai railway station. We followed the train tracks to where they make that sharp turn. There, at the station, we saw people looting wine. The buildings around there were a sorry sight. There were two cannons and three shot-up tanks here, too. Back home I looked over some books. At night, János Kádár gave a speech.



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In the morning only Dad came. He said Mum was sick. I was bored. At 1.30 p.m. I came home with Góré. Along the tram route there were two trucks with punctured petrol tanks. We also saw two wrecked Hungarian cannons. Back along the Great Boulevard, the word STRIKE was written all over the place. When I got home Mum and Dad were in bed, so I laid down, too, and did some reading.

Monday, November 12, 1956 and Tuesday, November 13, 1956

THE CORVIN RE-OPENS—FIRST GERMAN LESSON

In the morning I read some of Gulliver's Travels, *because that's what I borrowed for Maja from Jancsi's library. In the afternoon, from 2 to 3.30, I was at the German lesson with Jancsi. This was our first German lesson since the Revolution. On the*

way back we saw that the steeple of the St Roch Chapel was already being demolished and that bricklayers were working on the St Roch Hospital (Góré was working there, too). A leaflet was stuck to the poster for Professor Hannibal. *A lot of people were gathered around reading it. I remember this much: "We demand that Imre Nagy be freed! Kádár must resign! No more lies on the radio and in the newspapers!"*

Soldiers were guarding the Corvin, and four exploded mortar shells were lying at one corner. At night I did some reading, and I wrote in my diary, which I brought with me on the 9th from Auntie Bözsi's place.

****

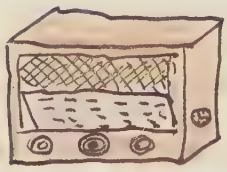
The Corvin opened this morning at 9 and will be open until 2. Mum and I wanted to go inside during the morning, but the queue was really long (all the way to the Paksi shoe store). So we went to the day and night shop. After queuing there for a while we bought flour and sugar. We saw that the Emke building is all empty inside and that the National Theatre was being repaired. In the afternoon I went over to Jancsi's. At his place, in his "castle", I gave him some parts of the movie Gábor the Student.

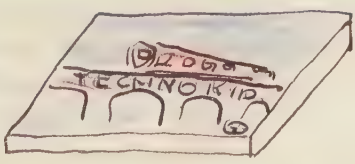
Wednesday, November 14, 1956 and Thursday, November 15, 1956

WE GET INSIDE THE CORVIN— RAG FAIR ON BLAHA L. SQUARE

Mum went out by 6 in the morning to queue up at the Corvin.[23] *Before 8 I went down there, too, to take over for Mum while she went home a little bit. Today it opened only at 10. We were let in with the first group. We bought a Terta radio and Mum got me a number 1 Technokid set. We came home only at 2. In the afternoon I asked Jancsi for his book about Robin Hood and I read some of it.*

In the morning I made road signs using the Technokid. I got up only around 12. Today the queue to get into the Corvin stretched almost to the school. Jancsi and I went to our German lesson at 1:30. There was a big rag fair that had started up on Blaha Lujza Square. I bought a coat of arms. At our German lesson, Galbaffy said that there was still fighting at Csepel Island and in Dunapentele. The workers on Csepel were hosing the Russians with petrol, then setting them on fire with blowtorches. At night I did some reading. Jancsi said the Russians had closed off the bridges.





23 ■ The reason for the endless queues was that, remembering the rampant inflation which followed the Second World War, people tried to get rid of all the cash they had.

Friday, November 16, 1956, Saturday, November 17, 1956
and Sunday, November 18, 1956

A WALK ALONG BAROSS STREET—A CALM SUNDAY

In the morning I made a wheelbarrow from the Technokid parts. In the afternoon I drew in my notebook. (See Box.) The strike kept going today.

****

Jancsi came over to our place in the morning and we played cards here. In the afternoon we went with Dad to Dad's doctor, Uncle Zselyonka. We went along the Boulevard to Rákóczi Square. We went down Bacsó Béla Street to Horváth Mihály Square. The telephone building there is being guarded by about ten Russkie tanks. When we got there, Uncle Zselyonka's father opened the door. He said that Uncle Zselyonka has been sick for a while now, that he's in room 7 on the first floor of Koltói Anna Hospital. He showed us how the apartment looks. The doctor's surgery got hit. The parquetry and the ceiling really took a lot of damage. Afterward we hurried home along Baross Street and the Great Boulevard, because it was already getting dark. We noticed that my violin teacher's apartment was hit, and that there were three tanks on Harminckettesek Square.

Monday, November 19, 1956 and Tuesday, November 20, 1956

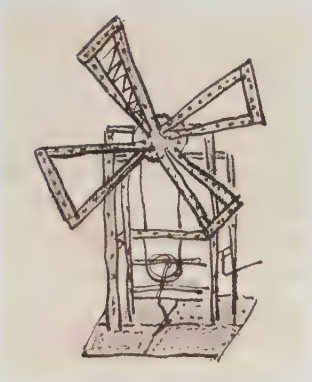
RECONSTRUCTION BEGINS

This morning the workers, with the exception of those in the food and construction industries, didn't go to work. Dad went to work in Rákospalota by bicycle, and Góré went to help repair the St Roch Hospital. In the afternoon I went with Jancsi to our German lesson, but first we went to ask how long office hours are on Trefort Street. From the corner of Szentkirályi Street we could see that whole sections of the Radio building had broken off in two places, and that three Russian tanks were guarding the place.

Afterward we went to our German lesson. We were there only until 3.15, because it's dangerous to be out on the street after 4, on account of the Russians deporting people. Tanks were out and about at night.

****

In the morning I took apart the things I'd made from the Technokid, and meanwhile Béla arrived from down south in Mohács. He said there were still 50,000 insurgents in the Mecsek Hills and that food is being sneaked to them. Jancsi came over in the afternoon. I made a windmill with the Technokid.



Wednesday, November 21, 1956 and Thursday, November 22, 1956

THE WORKERS' COUNCIL IS FORMED— THE OLYMPICS BEGIN

In the morning I was still in bed and playing with the Technokid when Jancsi came by. I gave Jancsi my copy of The Mysterious Island. *Before long he went out to the yard and, using the tap that was out there, he made a one-metre-high fountain, and on account of this, the caretaker took away his key, and Jancsi came back inside our place. We played cards. At night, Dad said that public transport had come to a halt. There were lots of tanks rumbling about. This means the deportations aren't over yet, though this is being denied tooth and nail in the UN.*

****

In the morning Mum headed off from home, and I stayed in bed working on my notebook. Afterward Jancsi came over and said that the Workers' Council had been formed and that the Olympics had begun. Then we played with the Technokid, and then Uncle Ali came by and we went into the Corvin. Jancsi and I went to our German lesson at 2. Tanks were out and about at night.

II. rész.

Magyarország a forradalom után.

II. rész.

Part II

Hungary after the Revolution

Friday, November 23, 1956

SILENT PROTEST—THE SNOWBALL FIGHT

I stayed in bed for a long time in the morning. When I got up, Jancsi came over. We began playing with the Technokid, but then Auntie Bözsi and Béla dropped by and we went out into the courtyard. It started snowing in the morning, and the yard got covered with a fine layer of the white stuff. Jancsi wanted to make a snow-bomb on a stick, but just when he wanted to throw it, I hit the stick and the snow fell off. Then Maja came, and the three of us lobbed snowballs here and there. Before long the girls came downstairs. We decided to have a snowball fight. Jancsi made snowballs from the snow in the yard while I made our cover out of a basket and a sieve. When there was no more snow in the yard, we went to Stáhly Street to get more. The girls made balls out of margarine they got from shop-windows. Mari and the girls built their cover in front of the garage. They put a wash tub up against the garage and put a basket on top. Before long Mari said let's begin. Before we got started I told Jancsi that we'd better really save our snowballs, because the girls have a whole lot. We told them to go first. Mari raised her hand and threw. The ball made its mark on the firewall behind us. Then I threw, but I missed. Jancsi then raised his hand and threw. The snowball whizzed by Mari 20 cm from her. Then Jancsi took off his gloves, seeing how it's easier to throw that way. One of my snowballs hit Mari, and the girls charged at us. Jancsi and I hid behind our cover. All of a sudden I thought of something and stood up. Which made them throw even harder. But I dodged every snowball. Let them just run out, I figured. All those snowballs left their marks on the firewall.

Mari R. called for the battle to end, and it did. Jancsi then came over to our place. While we were having our snowball fight in the yard, between 2 and 3 p.m., there was a silent protest out on the street—which is to say, anyone who stayed out on the street was voting for Kádár. Well, there wasn't a soul out there on the street the

whole time. This was to mark the one-month anniversary of the Revolution. We played cards with Jancsi at our place. The evening papers said that Imre Nagy went to Romania of his own free will.[24] *I got to sleep early.*

Saturday, November 24, 1956

A WALK ALONG A SHOT-UP RÁKÓCZI AVENUE

Jancsi was at our place in the morning and we played cards. Uncle Cselényi came over in the afternoon. Around 3 p.m. he went home, and we went along with him for a while. Rákóczi Street was all shot up from the Great Boulevard as far as Baross Square. The house at number 56 had collapsed. The same goes for the Fashion Hall and another house on Rákóczi Avenue. We had to wait a long time at the HÉV station. Back home, I played with Maja.

Sunday, November 25, 1956 and Monday, November 26, 1956
Tuesday, November 27, 1956 and Wednesday, November 28, 1956

JÁNOS KÁDÁR'S SPEECH

In the morning Gyula and I went to Rákospalota to get the motorbike. On the way there, Gyula took me on the bicycle. I was really cold by the time we got there, so I went into Uncle Lukács and his wife's place to warm up. Gyula took a while with the motorbike, because its engine was cold. On the way home we pulled the bicycle

24 ■ On 23 November, Imre Nagy left the Yugoslav Embassy on a safe-conduct letter by the Kádár government. He was seized and deported to Romania along with his associates by the Soviets.

behind us with the motorbike. By the time we got home I was really cold. Jóska came over in the afternoon. He told a lot of stories. At night I drew in the notebook. Jóska said that two guys from the MÁV housing estate defected today.

****

In the morning I came in by motorbike, then Gyula and I went by motorbike to Soroksár south of the city centre to get an electric maize-grinder. In the afternoon Jancsi and I went to our German lesson. Books were being distributed in Gyulai Pál Street. I got one, too, called Laughter in the Works. *Today, the German lesson was a free period: we played with the Tivoli pinball board while the others played ping-pong. At night, János Kádár gave a speech.*

Thursday, November 29, 1956 and Friday, November 30, 1956

AT MY VIOLIN TEACHER'S

The rain stopped by morning, so Gyula checked to see what the problem was with the motorbike. He looked at it again and again but didn't find the problem. It looked like we were going to have to go by tram, but Gyula didn't give up, and finally he found it. The problem was that the cable had become loose near the magnet. While Gyula was still fussing away at home, I went over to Jóska's. He showed me the radio they had bought on Saturday. Around noon Gyula and I got home. I noticed that there were no longer any tanks by the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky barracks, and that all those scars from the shooting were already being repaired on Baross Square. When we got home, I went for our German lesson with Jancsi. On the way, we noticed that the Kossuth coat of arms already has a crown back on it. That night Jancsi's family had a relative over who told a lot of stories... That night I read Slaves of God.[25]

****

In the morning Jancsi was over at our place. Both of us wrote in our diaries. In the afternoon I went to report to my violin teacher from the music school. He wasn't there and until he come back Aunt Erzsike showed me how the apartment was hit. The shell came in the room with the balcony, it tore right through the wall and went into the other room, where it exploded, sending shrapnel flying even to the third floor. It caused lots of damage. It tore apart a closet, a couch, some famous paintings and a Japanese vase. Once I got a time for my lesson, I went home. At night I read Slaves of God.

25 ■ A novel by the Hungarian author Géza Gárdonyi (1863–1922) set in medieval Hungary. The author's most popular novel, *Egri csillagok* (Stars of Eger), was the winner of Big Read in Hungary.

Saturday, December 1, 1956 and Sunday, December 2, 1956

FIRST TIME AT MY VIOLIN LESSON— SPEAKING TO A RUSSIAN— RUSSIAN SOLDIERS GET BURIED

In the morning, Jancsi bought a copy of Sport *and showed it to me, too. It reported Hungary's first Olympic victory—the kayak pair of Urányi and Fábián. Laci Papp made it into the semi-finals. I went to my violin lesson for 11, for the first time since October 23. I was in the room where they do the solfeggio. Even in there, every keyhole was sealed to keep the cold out. In the afternoon, Jancsi was arranging his books, so I helped him, too. Around 3 we left for Grandma's. I took my diary with me, too.*

****

In the morning I went, diary and all, to Jóska and his family's place. I got really scared when I saw that Russian soldiers were drilling on the football field. I asked Uncle Cselényi whether I should go that way. He said to go ahead. So I hid my diary and that's how I went toward Jóska's. I was almost in their doorway when a Russian soldier called out to me in Hungarian: "Come here!" I went over. Mixing Russian and Hungarian words, he asked, "How old are you? Where's your school? Where's your mum?" I said I'm ten years old. Before long he said, "Pahshlee domoy!" which means go home. I kept looking at them for a long time. During the break they fooled about a lot, tripping and shoving each other. In the afternoon I played with Maja. At night we heard some shots. At 8 p.m., the radio announced that there was no reason for anyone to be afraid, the shooting was only because Russian soldiers were being buried and salvos were being fired on account of this.

Monday, December 3, 1956 and Tuesday, December 4, 1956

HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL AGAIN—WOMEN'S PROTEST

In the morning I came home from Grandma's by motorbike. Today we had to go back to school, so I was there until 11–12. We talked there with the other kids. Mainly we repeated what we learned. Uncle Protzeller said that yesterday a crowd of people went into Free People *and threw out all the issues of* People's Freedom[26] *and* People's Will*, then set the whole heap on fire. From 2 to 3.30 I had my German class. From there I went straight to Béla's to make coats of arms.*[27]

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26 ■ "People's Freedom", i.e. *Népszabadság*, the new Party daily, replacing *Szabad Nép* on 2 November 1956. See Note 5.

27 ■ Due to the Revolution, badges, label pins and buttons with the "Kossuth coat-of-arms", the symbol of Hungary's 19th century war of independence, were in great demand. Béla Bajkó, stepson of Gyula Feherhegyi, was one of those making them, piercing and welding the pins onto the cut-out badges. The diarist helped by getting the badges ready for welding.

In the morning Béla gave me 20 forints, and I came home. On this day I swore that I'd keep writing this diary until the Russians leave. When I got home, Jancsi was arranging his desk, and on account of this the whole room was a mess. I helped him, too. In the afternoon Jancsi and I put his little Transylvanian house in order. We took it out of the radio box, dusted it off, and put it on top of the cupboard. Then I wondered where we should put the box, but finally I figured out that we should put it beside the little house and we should put the jam jars inside the box. At night I went to make Kossuth coats of arms. (See Box for a coat of arms.) Béla said that women in mourning had been out protesting on Rákóczi Avenue in the afternoon.

Wednesday, December 5, 1956 and Thursday, December 6, 1956

ST NICHOLAS DAY— DEMONSTRATION FOR AND AGAINST KÁDÁR

In the morning I got up and came right home, because there's going to be school. Before going, though, I wrote in my diary. Until 11–12 I was at school. Then I went to Jancsi's. We played a lot at his place, and the electric switch stopped working while we were playing. The UN decided today that General Secretary Hamarksjöld should visit Hungary on December 16. At night Jancsi came over to our place.

****

In the morning I went to make more Kossuth coats of arms. From there I went straight to German. While we were still making the coats of arms, Béla told me not to be out on the street between 2 and 3, because there's going to be a silent protest. During the German lesson I told Auntie Daisy, but she let me go home only after Auntie Kolonics arrived and said the same. I was hardly home when Góré came running and said that demonstrators were going all the way up Rákóczi Avenue and that he, too, had been told to go right home. He said the Russians were opening fire. In the afternoon I wrote in my diary. At night Auntie Putzer came down and said she'd seen the demonstrators. She said that there was one group demonstrating in support of Kádár. They were carrying red flags. By the Western Railway Station the other group of demonstrators, which was demonstrating against Kádár, threw things at the Communist group, of whom there were about 1500. The government then sent secret police—"policemen"—out there, and they shot and killed around 100 people. At night Dad brought a packet of sweets and a St. Nicholas chocolate.

Friday, December 7, 1956 and Saturday, December 8, 1956

THE OLYMPICS END—A WALK TOWARD ÜLLŐI ROAD—ONE AFTERNOON

I got up and spent the whole morning writing in my diary. In the afternoon I went over to Jancsi's. We looked over our city maps. Later Jancsi showed me his Austrian travel guide. And we looked at the maps of Switzerland, Germany and Serbia. I asked to borrow Jancsi's copy of Thomas Hansom the Airman. *That's what I read at night. I was in school until 11–12.*

****

I came home along Üllői Road and the Great Boulevard. A lot of buildings around there have already collapsed. After that we went to Grandma's. The Melbourne Olympics closed today with a ceremony. The Olympic flame has gone out. Even in such difficult circumstances, Hungary got fourth place. Our country won 9 gold, 10 silver and 7 bronze medals. Only the Soviet Union, the United States, and the host country, Australia, came ahead of Hungary.

The next Olympics will be in 1960, in Rome.

Sunday, December 9, 1956 and Monday, December 10, 1956

A NEW CALL TO STRIKE—DON'T WANDER ON THE STREETS

After getting up, I went over to Jóska's. I was really surprised to see that the Russians were no longer drilling. I asked Jóska for my diary and told him to come over. Maja and Ági were playing board games at our place. We started playing, too. In the afternoon, since Jóska wasn't at our place anymore, I went on reading Thomas Hansom the Airman *and I finished it, too. At night I began to read another book,* Maja's Adventures. *At night Uncle Mirsinszki said there would be a two-day strike.*

****

In the morning, Mum and I headed home. I met Jancsi in the doorway. He said that their Russian teacher told them not to go wandering on the streets. Which is why Jancsi and I didn't go to German in the afternoon, but instead played board games.

Tuesday, December 11, 1956 and Wednesday, December 12, 1956

CHAOS AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE—STRIKE

I woke up at 9 because I wanted to write in my diary, but I didn't write in it after all. Mum went to the market hall and I went to Jancsi's place. When we wanted to go back to our place Mum wasn't home yet, so we climbed in. Around noon Maja came running in and said a shot had been fired. Mum went outside, too, but didn't see a thing. Around 12.30 I also heard shots. I went outside and saw the people running. After that, we heard more machine-gun fire. Before long, all of Rákóczi Avenue emptied and we saw, near the National Theatre, men firing into the air, who used to be secret police and were now disguised as Hungarian soldiers and policemen. All those people just poured out of the Corvin. All the workers were saying that they *sure weren't coming to work tomorrow. Dad wasn't home yet. After that, they started shooting straight, too. The whole street was just booming. After that, Dad arrived and pretty soon a car rumbled down the road. Then Uncle Felber came, and he said the Boulevard was echoing from all the whistling and hooting from the people. At night, Uncle Felber came over. He and Dad talked...*

****

I spent the morning reading a book, Story of a Bicycle Brake. *Afterward I went to my violin lesson. Later I went over to Jancsi's, and then we went to the rag fair. Then we and Öcsi played cards, and after that we took another look at what was at the rag fair. Later I wrote in my diary. Bicskei and Uncle Felber came over in the evening. Uncle Bicskei said that as of tomorrow, he's going in to the factory. Mother: "And what is everyone doing there?" Uncle Bicskei: "We're doing maintenance, you know, twiddling our thumbscrews." (This means they're twiddling their thumbs.)*

Thursday, December 13, 1956 and Friday, December 14, 1956

GOING TO SCHOOL, AFTER ALL— A WALK AT THE RAG FAIR

In the morning Jancsi came over, and I took his lead by also beginning to copy my diary from my ugly old notebook into this one. We went to our German lesson at 1:30. On the way there we went by the rag fair to see if there were any good books, but there weren't any. On our way back we went that way, too. We saw that the steeple of the St Roch wasn't being repaired to be like it used to be.

At the National Theatre I found a cartridge-case. (See Box.) At night I wrote in my diary. In the afternoon Béla bought me Oliver Twist.

* * * *

At 7.30 I began reading Oliver Twist. *At 8.30 I got out of bed and wrote in my diary. Jancsi went to school, so I went too. We were with Auntie Vali the whole time.*

I was even called on to recite poetry. I got out of school at 12. I had lunch and went to see what was up at the fair. I couldn't get Tom Sawyer, Detective, *so instead I got* Robur the Conquerer. *Béla called me in to work in the afternoon, but I didn't go. At night I wrote in my diary.*

Saturday, December 15, 1956 and Sunday, December 16, 1956

THE RAG FAIR IS SHUT DOWN— JANCSI'S FAMILY GETS A RED CROSS PARCEL— AT MY GRANDMA'S

In the morning, people were whispering that the Russians had left. On the way to my violin lesson, I noticed that there were no tanks on Harminckettesek Square. Along the way I bought a Life & Science. *When I got home, I went over to Jancsi's. Jancsi said they got a Red Cross parcel. He told me what was in it:*

1 kg cocoa
1/2 kg coffee
1/4 kg tea
4 blocks of margarine
5 bars of chocolate
1/2 liter of lemon juice
2 1/2 bars of Lux toilet soap
2 1/2 bars of washing soap
100 cigarettes
1/4 kg powdered milk
3 tins of sardines
3 tins of condensed milk

In the afternoon we went to Grandma's. We noticed that the rag fair had shut down. At Grandma's I read.

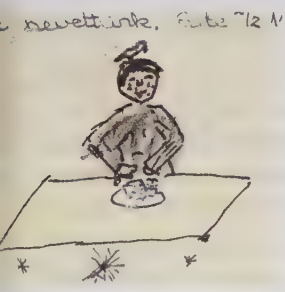
* * * *

In the morning I drew the building for the diary. Afterward Jóska came over. The kids were throwing firecrackers around. In the afternoon I went with Auntie Bözsi to work. There were more Russian cars than Hungarian ones out on Kerepesi Street. Béla wasn't home yet, which is why I got to reading the book Pál Szabó, Hermit of the North Pole. *We soldered 1,000 badges with the Kossuth coat of arms on them.*

Wednesday, December 19, 1956

THE COATS OF ARMS ARE BEING MADE FAST

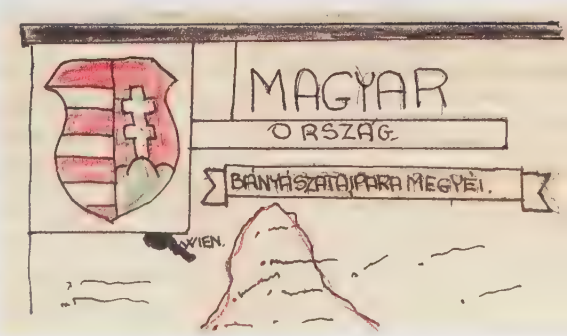
When I woke in the morning, I wrote in my diary. Then I went to my violin lesson. When I got home Jancsi and I hung around. In the afternoon I went back to work. Béla said that today we've got to make a whole lot of coats of arms, because the painters have few left. And we made 2,000, even though in the meantime we were worrying all the time, because Auntie Örsy's mother is a sick woman, and at first she was looking for the parrot in Béla's hair, then she went out on the balcony overlooking their building's inner courtyard and took to whistling to lure it back. After that she wanted to travel to Szerdahely. When she was having supper, the parrot landed on her head. We got a good laugh out of that. At 10.30 we went to bed.



Friday, December 21, 1956

THE SCHOOL HANDS OUT A PARCEL

In the morning I read some of Oliver Twist. *Then Gyula came by and told me to go make some coats of arms, because there are lots of orders. I went, too, but Béla was still writing letters. While he went to mail them, I finished ten coats of arms. Today we soldered 1,000 of them. We couldn't make any more, since the guy who prints them didn't come. When we finished, Béla paid me 140 forints. Then I went home. Maja said the school would have handed out parcels today, except that the parcels didn't arrive, so they'll only do it tomorrow. In the afternoon Maja found the book I got her for Christmas. Mum told me, and I gave it to Maja. I didn't know what to buy Mum or Dad for Christmas, so I gave them each 100 forints plus 40 forints. Béla had Gyula pass me the message for me to go back to work, but I didn't go. In the afternoon I washed off the sticks I used to hang the map and I took apart the diesel train I had made from the Technokid set. At night, Mihály and them came over to play cards. Meanwhile I worked on that special playing card I'd begun making. I peeled the Constitution coats of arms off the map, and stuck on a Kossuth coat of arms.*



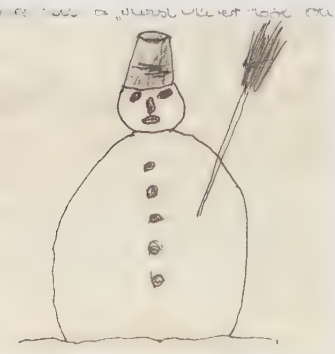
Monday, December 24, 1956

CHRISTMAS EVE

It snowed at night, so by morning the snow was already 10 centimetres thick. Maja went sledding, but I couldn't go, because yesterday my shoes got soaked and I didn't have a pair of snow boots here. Around 10, Mum found a pair of woman's snow boots in the attic, and I got them on. I went over to Jóska's. Jóska came over with Susy. At Ági's place we knocked the head off Sanyika's snowman. Ági and Maja said we should have a snowball game. First we took Susy home. On the way there, we threw a lot of snowballs at Uncle Horváth. He wanted to give us a snow bath, but we ran away, and he was able to hit only Jóska, because he fell. Afterward we bombarded the Cselényi girls, too. When we got back, Ági and them didn't want to snowball, after all, which is why we got to rolling snowballs in the snow in the yard, and one of them finally got so big that it was up to my shoulder. After lunch I made a snowman out of the snowballs, but I couldn't finish, because Dad called me in to tie string onto the foil-wrapped fondants so we could hang them on the Christmas tree. In the afternoon we decorated the Christmas tree. At night I read some of Oliver Twist.

Tuesday, December 25, 1956

THE FIRST DAY OF CHRISTMAS



I woke up at 8.30 in the morning. Dad didn't go to work today. I got dressed and went over to Jóska's. They were all dressed already, too. The two of us went on ahead, so we'd get to sit way up front in church. It was cold. The cold nipped my ears. After walking half an hour we reached the Rákosfalva Church. We went to 10 o'clock mass. At 11 we headed home. When I got home I wanted to finish making the snowman, but it was already done. Béla said he'd done it, and that he'd already taken a picture of Maja standing beside it. He took my picture, too. I had lunch and went over to Jóska's. I wanted him to come sledding with me, but he wasn't allowed to. Then I went home and started making the castle bigger, but all of a sudden there was Jóska. He said he was allowed to go sledding, after all. At first we went to the training ground. My sled was really swerving, and so I took it home. Afterward I returned, and because there were such a crazy lot on the slope, we went over to the Sipos. The Sipos was all full of dirt, so we went home. At night I read some of Oliver Twist.

Wednesday, December 26, 1956

THE SECOND DAY OF CHRISTMAS

I woke at 9 in the morning. I began making the castle, because Gyula said that Uncle Ali, who has a 10-year-old boy, would come by in the afternoon with his whole family. I wasn't even half done with the castle when Uncle Ali and everyone arrived to play cards. Pista and Maja and I went sledding at the Sipos. Jóska was there, too. The Sipos wasn't good, though, so we went over to the training ground. There I learned how to steer the new sled. We couldn't stay long, since Pista and them went home. I finished building the castle. I was sad when Gyula then announced that they're taking the castle away tomorrow. And so in the afternoon I built a castle on top of the snowman in the yard. In the evening I let out Sajó and played with him. At first he just ran around the yard as loopy as could be while I was building the castle, but it was so funny to see that I couldn't keep building the castle, and so I went on ahead. Sajó happened upon Frici and got to playing with him, but Frici climbed to the top of the veranda. I wanted to take Frici down, but Mum came and called for me to go in. I didn't say a thing, but Sajó gave me away. I played a bit more with Sajó, then I went in.

Saturday, December 29, 1956

LAST VIOLIN LESSON OF THE YEAR

Since I got to sleep late last night, today I stayed in bed snoozing for a long time. When I got up, Mum and I took the clothes up to the attic. Then I went to my violin lesson for the last time in the year 1956. When I got home, I wanted to take Jancsi's diary over to him, but he wasn't home. The caretaker-lady said he'd gone to Buda. I wrote him a note, and just when I went to slip it into the apartment, that's when he got back. So I went back to get his diary and I asked to borrow his book catalogue so I could show it to Jóska. Maja said that yesterday's People's Freedom *ran a nasty caricature. I asked our caretaker for this nasty caricature.*

At 1.30 Mum and I left for Grandma's, just the two of us, because Maja went by motorbike. In Népszínház Street we bought a People's Freedom *and* Life & Science *and a* Puzzler *comic calendar. When I got home, I began taking apart the castle. Before long Pista and his grandfather arrived. They brought the frame for the cauldron and the sausage-filling machine by sled. Pista said we should go sledding. And we did go, to the training slope. After we had a tumble, Pista didn't come down anymore. I came home and read* Puzzler *and some of* Oliver Twist.

Sunday, December 30, 1956

A LITTLE ACCIDENT

Today I didn't get up early. Maja went over to Ica's. When she got back she said Marci was really bored, so I should go over. When I went over, we went sledding. We'd been sledding for a while when I had an accident.

It was my nail that got hit in the accident, and it got all black and blue. Then we came home and I looked at the skaters at the railway workers' housing estate. The Russkies came by the estate again and took away a railwayman. In the afternoon I went to the pictures. I saw an old Hungarian film called Hyppolyt the Lackey. *It was a really good movie, I laughed my head off. At night Franci brought over a Communist pamphlet from Uncle Mirsinszky called* Counter-revolutionary Looting during the October Events. *That's what I read in bed.*

Monday, December 31, 1956

NEW YEAR'S EVE

In the morning, Mum went into Pest and I went over to Marci's. At first we played chess a bit, then we played cards and dominoes. When Maja and I went home, Mum wasn't there yet. I had lunch and we went sledding. It was really good on the training slope. At first we went on our sled, which wasn't swerving any more. Then we went on Marci's sled. We soared on that, and how. We almost made it to the third hole. When we got back home, Marci didn't go home. And we played cards, zsíros *and* snapszli. *It was dark by the time Marci went home. I called Maja to come home. We didn't have a merry New Year's Eve this year. Even the radio didn't have a good New Year's Eve broadcast. Mum and Dad went to the Cselényis to play cards. Uncle Mirsinszky came by our place for a little while. All evening I wrote in my diary. Auntie Bözsi and Franci went to bed early. Mum and Dad came by at midnight to wish us a Happy New Year. Dad said they're shooting again. Mum brought a copy of* People's Freedom. *I read it in the evening. It had a photo supplement that ran the picture below. That same night I pasted the picture into my diary. I went to bed at 1.30. I went to sleep fast. At midnight István Dobi[28] gave a speech and wished everyone a Happy New Year. There were hailstones at night.* ❧

Translated by Paul Olchvary

28 ■ István Dobi (1898–1968), president of the Presidential Council between 1952–67.

Newspaper photograph pasted in by the diarist after his entry for 31 December 1956.

(This is the first of two lengthy extracts from the Diary.
The second part will appear in our Autumn Issue)

Poems

Zbigniew Herbert

To the Hungarians

Rapsodia Węgierska

We are standing at the border
we stretch out our hands
and knot a great rope of air
for you brothers

of broken cries
and clenched fists
a bell is cast and a heart
sounding silent alarm

the wounded stones are pleading
the murdered river is pleading
we are standing at the border
we are standing at the border

just standing at the border
the name of which is reason
we watch the conflagration
we gasp amazed at death

Translated from the Polish by Clive Wilmer
and George Gömöri

Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998),
the Polish poet, took part as a young man in the anti-German resistance.
His first book of poetry was published in 1956. "To the Hungarians", written that year,
appeared in his second book of poetry, without the title.
For many years he lived in Germany, France and the United States.

Adam Ważyk

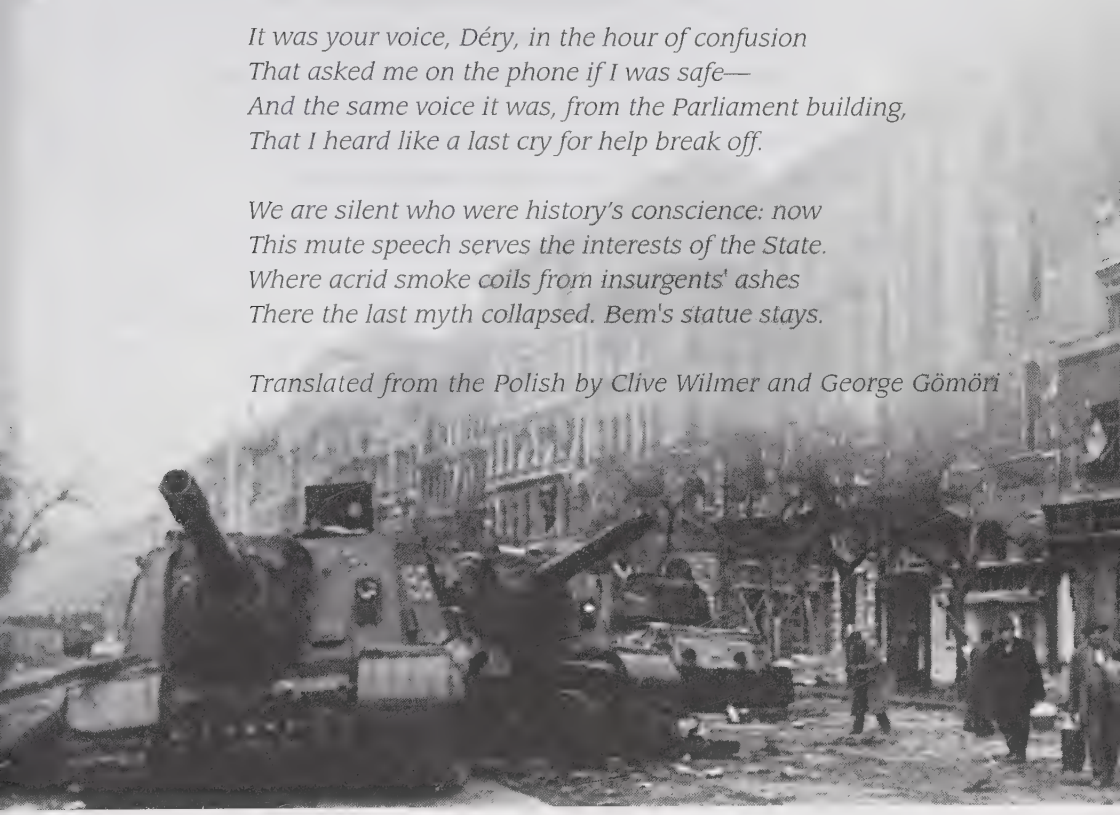
Qui tacent clamant

I stood beside you at General Bem's statue
The day Hungarian and Polish flags were raised.
I don't know which of you is dead or wounded
Now the voices are silent and fires only blaze.

It was your voice, Déry, in the hour of confusion
That asked me on the phone if I was safe—
And the same voice it was, from the Parliament building,
That I heard like a last cry for help break off.

We are silent who were history's conscience: now
This mute speech serves the interests of the State.
Where acrid smoke coils from insurgents' ashes
There the last myth collapsed. Bem's statue stays.

Translated from the Polish by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri



Photograph by Tibor Szentpétery

Adam Ważyk (1905–1982),
was a Polish poet whose leftist leanings took him to Lwów, where he lived between 1938–1941. After the Second World War he returned to Poland as a political officer of the Communist-directed Kościuszko Army. In 1955 he published "Poemat dla dorosłych" (Poem for Adults), which made him an important player in the Polish Thaw. He witnessed the Hungarian Revolution on October 23, 1956. In 1957, in protest against censorship, he left the Polish United Worker's Party. Tibor Déry, mentioned in the poem, was a Hungarian Communist novelist who became an active member of the circle around Imre Nagy, the Revolution's prime minister, and for this was imprisoned under the Kádár government.

Edwin Morgan

A Statue

The statue was manhandled down quite slowly
for safety's sake, being so huge and heavy,
and hundreds more than had been reckoned likely
came to stare and shout and spit and cheer those
businesslike demolishers. Then they were dancing
on fallen concrete epaulettes, a shoulder,
a block of rain-black cheek where the split face had
burst and spilt no blood or brain, no anything
apart from rusty rods that mocked each human
backbone with their undestroyed reminder
of iron laws and iron men; dance! tear them!
By nightfall, all had gone. The broken pieces
lay huddled under an uneasy moonlight.
Clouds trailed their gravecloths. Shots cracked, though faintly.
One by one, muffled scuttling figures gathered
among the ruins and began to pocket fragments,
melting off quickly into the dark. None gestured,
none spoke. A knuckle, an ear-lobe, a button
vanished to unknown cupboards and shoe-boxes,
not ikons for diehards but mere mementoes
of bad times those who took them hardly dreamed of
returning, except that they did dream it, later,
making their children finger a few ugly
shards of pain that never can be buried.

Edwin Morgan (1920)
the widely admired Scottish poet, has published many verse translations from numerous languages, including Hungarian. The poem, reprinted here by permission, first appeared in Sweeping out the Past, *Carcanet, 1994.*

Jules Supervielle

To Our Hungarian Friends

A nos amis hongrois

While this our planet
With all her lands
Turns cruelly round
Her Hungary, who
Mountain-ridged bleeds
For the five continents,
Your monstrous fate
Makes us all guilty.
As if to be brought
Before the court
With its just Judge,
We open our windows
On to light that hurts,
Who can do nothing
But fall to our knees,
Who do not believe,
Who pray for you.

Translated from the French by Clive Wilmer

Jules Supervielle (1884–1960),
the French poet, was born in Uruguay of French parents. His first important book of poems, Gravitations, *appeared in 1925. He also wrote the libretto for* Bolivar, *set to music by Milhaud. The poem above, written at the time of the Hungarian Revolution, was printed in French and Hungarian in Tibor Tollas, ed.,* Gloria Victis, *Munich, 1966.*

George Gömöri

Milltime

Malomidő

"The mills of God grind fast"
(Sándor Márai on October 23, 1956)

The mills of God grind fast
the mills of God grind slow
for who is able to tell
is it long or short
that half-life those 33 years
before stubbornly hoped-for justice was done
something that is both too much and too little—
at any rate in the meantime the flour
(ground exceedingly small by the mills already mentioned)
was sprinkled on our heads
by the time we could bury our dead
our hair has quietly turned to frost

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

George Gömöri
is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist, Retired Lecturer in Polish Literature at the University of Cambridge, author of several books of poetry and essays. In collaboration with the English poet Clive Wilmer, he has published translations of the poetry of Miklós Radnóti, György Petri and others.

A Major Oversight on Our Part

Geza Katona, Interviewed by Zsolt Csalog

From 1953 until the end of 1957, I served at the American Legation in Budapest—during precisely the most critical and interesting period.

My parents were both Hungarian by birth, and they raised me as a Hungarian, too, and—well, that's why I went to Budapest, in order to do something, anything, for the Hungarian people, for my homeland. And I call it "my homeland" because although for me, as an American Hungarian, home is America first and foremost, all the same I feel Hungary is, too.

I had a fairly good job by then with US Steel in Pittsburgh, but I heard that the State Department was on the look-out for young men who spoke Hungarian or other East European languages. That was exactly what I had been waiting for, so off I went to Washington. And there they immediately offered me a job.

I went through one year of training—that was in 1951–52. Meanwhile, my family was in Pittsburgh, and I only got to see them very rarely, so in '52, I brought them down to Washington. By then we had three sons. Some time after that, they asked me if I would like to go to Budapest. Well, I would have liked nothing better: that had been my dream—Budapest! I was delighted to accept the proposal, and we set off in August '53.

My post was assistant to the political officer, his deputy, and I was also head of the Legation's translation section, a group of three who translated into English articles that appeared in Hungarian papers and occasionally made digests of Hungarian radio broadcasts. They were well-trained, experienced people who could work pretty well on their own: they would make notes of anything they considered important, or if I found anything of interest in the Hungarian press, I would take that over to them as well to translate. That was our routine work.

Zsolt Csalog (1935–1997)

writer, ethnographer, a prominent opposition figure under the Communist regime. He was a pioneer of reportage that dealt with the poor and the Roma in Hungary. Developing a sophisticated style of his own for oral history interviews, he also employed this approach in his fiction. The above interview was conducted in 1984

But I had yet another duty, too. At that point, there were only two of us in the Budapest Legation who, as Americans of Hungarian extraction, actually spoke Hungarian more or less fluently. The other one was Antal Nyerges, the press information officer, who also represented the Voice of America and was fairly busy; so that was how the reception of 'visitors' also came to be one of my duties.

It was a pretty mixed bunch of people. Many came in just to pour their hearts out, believing that within the American Legation they were on free soil and could speak safely. The sad fact was, though, that we were crawling with spies and informers. Then, there were people who, out of their own eagerness, had brought some tiny piece of information, a bit of news or a rumour that they wanted to pass on to the West. Then again, there were a great many self-styled inventors who came along with the widest range of inventions that they were unable to commercialize in Hungary... And also, it goes without saying, a heap of ÁVO—State Security—people sent in to spy and stir up trouble. It took a bit of practice before I was able to tell them apart from the well-intentioned visitors. And then, as you would expect, were the many, many persecuted individuals. They told their dreadful stories; we heard them out patiently, but we couldn't help them, how could we have helped them?

It was also supposed to be part of my work to try and familiarize myself with life outside the Legation, in the city and the provinces, except there was very little opportunity to do that. It was mainly a matter of organising outdoor picnics in the hope that one would manage to meet people. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. We were also fairly restricted. There were areas that we could not go to at all, like Miskolc, an industrial city, or for a longish spell, even the Balaton region. I remember once going with the military attaché on a car trip to the east of the country and coming to a hill just outside Eger that was full of wine cellars. We stopped in front of one of the cellars where there was a cluster of people and asked if we might taste their wine, because we were thinking of buying some. The moment they saw the car they were highly suspicious; indeed, they asked us which town we were from, what department. "Oh yes? The American Legation. You're Americans?"—and the atmosphere changed immediately.

"Huh! We thought you must be Party members!"

Proffered drinks and hospitality, of course, were immediately forthcoming, as well as introductions, with everybody talking all at once.

"The next time, don't come by car, but aeroplane!"

In the spring of '55, there was heavy flooding, and the American government sent food aid, which meant us going around to quite a few villages along the Danube distributing parcels to the needy. I acted as interpreter to the minister, but whenever I could, I preferred to stand a little to the side and pay attention to what people were talking about among themselves. There were times when they would call me to one side and whisper to me:

"Tell me, how long can this go on?"

"How long can this go on?" everyone was asking—that was the question on people's lips in Hungary at that time. Even if I couldn't give an answer, those

chance encounters were useful in making me understand that the Communist regime was not stable, because people were very discontented; the Hungarians felt very disgruntled, and everyone was waiting for help from us, from America.

I should add that, every now and then, we would relay these experiences and impressions to Washington. We submitted weekly reports to the State Department, and in these we would not only mention unusual events, but also provide a general picture of how we viewed the situation in Hungary.

I have always had a dog, and I had dogs in Budapest, too; when it comes down to it, it was my dogs who helped me escape our isolation. In '55, I got to know an elderly gentleman who bred Hungarian Vizsla pointers, and through him I was able to go to many places and meet quite a lot of Hungarians. He took me shooting with him, and this gave us chances for much talking at leisure. I never asked anyone straight out what they thought of the regime, but in '55 and '56, people let out what was on their minds. By then everyone was taking politics and complaining, openly airing opinions and furiously cursing the regime. Once they learned I was American, there was no stopping them!

I also had my dogs to thank for the opportunity they gave to move around in Pest as well. I used to take them for walks in the City Park. Now, Budapesters like good-looking dogs, and many would approach me on that account. We would get to chatting. People were bolder in the open air, and in the City Park there was little reason to be fearful of being overheard. That was despite the fact that I was often tailed—at times for two or three weeks at a time, after which there would be a short pause, then another week—that was how it went. Usually, however, I was aware of them, because they were rather glaringly obvious in the way they went about it. At that time, there was not much automobile traffic in Budapest, so we were already quite familiar with the license plates and would announce any new ones to one another.

"Hey!" I'd say to Nyerges, "I was followed today by CD 611. Make a note of it. I think it's a State Security car!" We'd pass on tips like that, and it wasn't hard to keep ten or fifteen registration numbers in your head.

I recall that in the autumn of '56—it must have been around early October—my Vizsla fellow took me to a vintage celebration somewhere near Székesfehérvár. The peasants were in high spirits, perhaps loosened up by drink or by the music, because they had three Gypsies with them who were playing the good old Hungarian tunes in among the vine props. One of them became so wrapped up in the atmosphere that he struck up the tune "I'm a soldier of Miklós Horthy's." At this, he pulled off his shirt and showed that tattooed onto his skin was the Hungarian crown: the crown of St Stephen. And he kept on until the peasants started to sing in chorus, "Long live Hungary!" and then, "Long live the Hungary of old!"

I had not heard that before, nor did I after that; it was something you could hardly get away with in Budapest, and I don't think that during the Revolution that's what the freedom fighters wanted to see—of all things the Hungary of old

restored. But out in the country, that was one of the sentiments that also existed—or at least, so I heard at that vintage celebration.

What was particularly interesting for me, though, was that I was now convinced that something had irresistibly got under way, something now had to happen.

We dispatched regular reports about these things to Washington. What I don't know, however, is who there read them and to what extent they reflected upon what we sent.

I recall that in August '56, I was sent from Budapest to attend a conference in Munich that was organized by Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Under discussion were specifically the topics of what the situation in Eastern Europe was really like, what the prospects were and what people should be prepared for. Most of those who spoke could see and sense that the situation was in flux; something was changing, nevertheless they didn't ascribe too much significance to the shifts. I couldn't understand this sluggish reaction, so I, too, offered some remarks—in a modest sort of way, of course, as befitted my low-ranking status, but still trying to get them to understand that in Hungary something serious and important was in the air, that one could definitely sense that a process had been set in motion and...

"Ah! Nonsense. That's just your personal impression. You're exaggerating!"—that was the response.

"Well, fair enough, maybe you see things more clearly..."

As it happens, the legation in Budapest itself was not ready for anything of a more serious nature. We were in the strange position that, strictly speaking, we did not even have a minister! Unfortunately, even these quite discernible portents had sounded no alarm bells in America. Nothing was stirring in Washington.

Prior to this, the minister to Budapest had been Chris Ravndal. He was very fond of the Hungarians and took a strong line with the Communist government, being well-informed and having the necessary knowledge of the country; but then, his tour of duty ended in August '56. Ravndal had been a decisive, vigorous, gutsy fellow, and his word was listened to in Washington. If he had still been minister to Budapest in October '56, I'm sure the American government would have reacted quite differently to the Hungarian Revolution.

Ravndal left in August, and a new minister had not come to replace him, only a chargé d'affaires, Barnes, who did not have any appreciable rank, weight or actual powers, and for that reason, he was exceedingly cautious, weak and soft. He did not take any action when the situation would have demanded it, or when we would have regarded it as proper; Barnes held back and waited. Another person who went at the same time as Ravndal was Ernő Nagy, who had also been important in view of his knowledge of the Hungarian language.

On 21 October, a Sunday, the weather was fine and warm, almost springlike, and I went out with my wife for a stroll. We walked along Andrássy Avenue. Budapesters were drinking cups of coffee on the terraces of the cafés around the Opera House, but somehow one could almost sense the electricity in the air.

Whether it was the way people were speaking just a fraction louder than normal, or that their expressions showed their nervousness, I don't know, it wasn't from any tangible signs that I drew that conclusion. It was merely an overall feeling.

On Monday, my wife and I went to Vienna, but only to take care of the most urgent matters before going back, since I felt uneasy.

"Hurry, hurry, because I've got a feeling something's going to happen in Pest. Something's going to happen in Pest!"

I had to stop by one of the sections of our Embassy where a colleague I knew asked how things were going in Budapest.

"Something's going on now," I told him, "I can hardly wait to get back, because I have a feeling something's brewing!"

"OK, I won't hold you up. I can see you're on edge. Just go!"

We managed to set off back fairly early on Tuesday, which was 23 October.

We got back home and had something to eat. In the meantime, I listened to the noises that were coming from the street. Voroshilov Avenue was abuzz, like when the crowd poured out at the end of a football match in the People's Stadium—only now there was no match on. A dense stream of humanity was surging towards the City Park. I switched on the radio. At that moment, Gerő[1] happened to be speaking. Well, that made me really nervous.

"I'm going out," I said to my wife, "because I want to see what's going to happen now!"

I went on foot, letting myself be carried along by the crowd. Along with everyone else, I ended up in Stalin Square.

By then the statue had been toppled. There lay Stalin, on the asphalt, with people kicking the enormous metal body, pounding it with hammers. The crowd, however, was not as packed as it had been, because by then shooting had started at the Hungarian Radio building, and most people had set off in the direction of the inner city. Someone—a student by the looks of him—climbed onto the plinth of the statue and started addressing the crowd.

"Fellow countrymen," he said—not "comrades"—but fellow countrymen, "we've just come from the Radio, and ÁVO men are shooting from the Radio building; they're murdering people. Fellow countrymen, Hungarian blood is being shed at the Radio!"

"Let's go to the Radio! Everyone to the Radio!"

Someone held up some bullets—spent, flattened bullets—that had also been brought from the Radio building.

I no longer recall everything...

There in the square were five or six trucks. A group of workers from Soroksár went into town with us, as many people cramming aboard as could fit, but there

1 ■ Ernő Gerő (1898–1980), Hungarian Communist politician, one of the closest associates of Mátyás Rákosi, along with whom and Mihály Farkas, he formed the "troika" that bore the largest share of responsibility for the illegal abuses of power of the era.

were also many who set off on foot. Maybe no more than a thousand people were left around the toppled statue. I left them there and hurried home to pick up my car. I realised that I wasn't going to get very far by walking.

I wasn't able to get too close to the Radio building, and it wouldn't have been safe to push it as gunfire was crackling in Bródy Sándor Street, there was heavy fighting going on. It was serious stuff, then—an uprising! I wasn't able to get close to it, but I did make my way around the neighbourhood and even so saw plenty. On Múzeum Boulevard, a few cars had been overturned and set on fire. They were burning away. I looked at the license plate of one of them, and it was, in fact, one of the ÁVO's vehicles—they'd got that one right! There, too, the streets were full of people; they were excited, happy, racing around to obtain weapons from somewhere. I saw soldiers as well, but they didn't have weapons on them. Girls had taken the red star off their caps and pinned red-white-and-green ribbons in their place, though I don't know how they'd managed to lay hands on ribbon out of the blue at night. Meanwhile, a hundred or two hundred yards from us a siege was in progress, an engagement, war...

I had no idea what my colleagues knew or didn't know, whether they had any reliable news and had been able to get on top of what was happening. I thought I ought to report to them on what I had seen, so I drove over to the Legation on the off-chance that someone was there. The building was always guarded by the Hungarian police, and there was an officer standing by the main entrance, listening to the distant rattle of gunfire.

I went into the building; there was a marine inside who let me in, but he was the only one there. I recalled that there had been some diplomatic function that evening at the French Legation; maybe they were still there. I sat down by a telephone and tried a few numbers. I finally reached Barnes, the chargé d'affaires, at the French minister's residence. He had already learned a bit about the events, but the key exciting details he heard about from me.

"Well," he says, "if that's really how things stand, I'd better get over there!"

In under half an hour, the greater part of the diplomatic corps had come over together into the Legation. We put together a telegram to Washington, giving an impromptu rundown of the main events: armed uprising, the Radio building under siege, the statue of Stalin overturned, street fighting at various points of the city—a revolution had broken out...

It was almost three in the morning before I realised how the time had slipped by. Gleason, the deputy military attaché, didn't have a car, as his wife had given him a lift over from the French Legation reception, and he asked if he could come with me. They lived next door. We went by a roundabout route on the off-chance that we might see something new. We passed by Múzeum Boulevard on the way: the siege of the Radio was still going on with undiminished ferocity, but gunfire could also be heard from several other directions as well. We headed in that direction, but at the outer end of Andrássy Avenue it was all still, not a soul around, the Soviet Embassy building in complete darkness. I even said to Gleason

that if the uprising had been an action that was planned in advance, there was no way the Soviet Embassy would not have been targeted!

At home, by chance, there was a tape recorder. There weren't such things as cassette recorders in those days, so this one used reels, but it was fairly small and light, a portable machine. I had borrowed it from the Legation the previous week, because I intended to make a recording of a sung mass in St Stephen's Basilica since one of the Legation's employees was singing. Before going to bed, I got this little recorder out and stood with the microphone at an open window so I could record the crackle of gunfire. It was readily audible from a number of directions, even though it was after half past three by then. Then, on top of the distant clatter of shots, a new sound could be picked out. A booming, rumbling noise that grew ever louder until the very walls began to tremble, as if it were an earthquake. And then the tanks appeared. I had a clear view of them from the window: below me, a long line of Russian tanks on Voroshilov Avenue, Russian soldiers lying or crouching on top of them, gripping submachine guns, rifles...

So, the Russian army was being sent into action...

It crossed my mind that I ought to take a few pictures, but then I had second thoughts. What if the soldiers were to notice the flash. Obviously, they would open fire on me. I didn't take any photographs, but I did tape-record the sounds of the Russian entry into the fighting.

In the morning, I again went in with Gleason. We again took a roundabout way. By then it was possible to see the effects of the tanks' work on the streets: big round holes blown in the walls of houses and rubble.

Before the previous March 15th, I had managed to find some red-white-and-green ribbon in a shop—it was no easy job tracking it down either!—and had bought around two yards of it. I might have used two inches of it for March 15th, but the rest I had kept—that, too, out of a sort of presentiment that maybe an occasion would arise when I would need it. On the morning of 24 October, I got out this almost six-foot length and took it in with me to the Legation, where I fastened it to a window to flutter in the breeze...

On the morning of the 24th, we held a small confab, again going over and piecing together the main facts about the situation, hearing out what everyone had to say and settling on a course of action. We agreed that there were just two things to do: to inform ourselves as fully as possible and to keep Washington informed as fully as possible about the developments. After that, it was up to Washington to tell us what else we should do. Duties were allotted as well; some wanted to stay indoors, but a few of us were happy to take on the task of going out into the city to look around. We divided Budapest up among us, with someone being given Castle Hill and its surroundings, someone else the area around the Southern railway terminal, and so on. We would go round the locality assigned, get back and report on what we had seen to the others. In that way, to some

extent, a coherent picture was assembled. From time to time, we would send a digest of this to Washington, without being able to do much in the way of appending any opinions as the political situation was very confused, and we didn't really have any reliable facts about that.

In the meantime, it caused us serious problems that it was hard to maintain our lines of communication with the State Department, and we were continually being cut off. In all truth, the legation in Budapest was unprepared for an extraordinary situation in this respect. By then all our key missions had been furnished with modern telecommunications equipment, but who would have thought of that in the case of Budapest? As a result, we had no choice but to send our telegrams via postal service lines—coded, of course, as it wouldn't have been too clever to exchange open telegrams. Initially, we also had telephone contact, likewise via a Hungarian Postal Service line and our centre in Munich, but that was cut. And then telegraphic communications were also broken for a while. We called up the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to demand that we should be left with at least our telegraph connection, but that had no effect. There was a point when I went over to the Foreign Ministry with Tom Rogers, one of the attachés—that must have been some time at the end of October, when the Revolution seemed to be basically victorious but the state of affairs was most contradictory, with some of the old Communist leaders remaining in office and conducting fairly successful sabotage work. We took along with us a telegram for them to transmit, because we had no contact at all with Washington, leaving us in an impossible position. To our surprise, a Communist big-shot by the name of Károly Csatorday emerged to receive us. We were already acquainted with him; he was someone whose career carried on during the Kádár years until he died in a plane crash during the Sixties. As soon as he saw our friend Csatorday, Rogers indicated to me that it had been a pity to come, because we couldn't expect to get anything out of him. And sure enough, our man trotted out every imaginable objection as to why it was impossible and why they couldn't transmit it.

"Listen, sir," says Rogers, "you people have a duty to transmit this, because diplomatic convention requires you to do so!"

"But," splutters the Communist functionary, "I can't read it, it's in code!"

We almost burst out laughing—a good thing it was coded.

Wonder of wonders: the telegram eventually, nevertheless, reached Washington—with a delay of several days, of course.

It was clear, then, that this path was closed, so we dug out an old wireless transmitter and with great difficulty managed to put it into working order. That meant straying into an operation that was not entirely by the book, but we had no choice. The Russians must have picked this up, however, because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called to tell us to quit it: we weren't supposed to use a radio. The situation was left unresolved until 2 November. We did have a telex machine, incidentally, but that only enabled us to send open texts, not confidential messages, to our Embassy in Vienna.

It was odd that we were running around the streets of Budapest at the height of the fighting, much like the Budapesters themselves. I was well aware that I had nothing to fear from the Hungarians, the insurgents, I just had to be careful not to step into the path of a bullet. With the Russians, let's say I could never feel safe, but I went about all the same, and essentially, I got everywhere.

Yet, some very brutal acts occurred. There was the slaughter in the square in front of the Parliament building on 25 October—that badly shook me.

At the Legation, it was hectic, with huge numbers of visitors dropping in, mostly just casually to tell us something—an interesting scrap of news, to report on conditions in some part of town or another—and thus, to set down another small piece of the whole confusing large mosaic before hurrying away. I well remember one young army officer who told us that he was at the Kilián Barracks and asked us for our telephone number so that he could call us if anything of interest happened around there. And he did telephone, several times at that; he was put straight through to me, and I could hear him shouting to make himself heard over the din of battle:

"The bastards are coming! They're here!"

It was strange hearing the artillery fire and the rattle of machine-guns a second or two earlier on the telephone before the sound reached us through the air...

Nyerges had started attending meetings of the Petőfi Circle back in June. I had tried to go once, but couldn't get near because of the crush of people and had been obliged to make do with a general impression. Nyerges, on the other hand, had managed to get to know a few writers and composers, and now they, too, came to the Legation. It was Nyerges who spoke with them, so I know nothing about the details of the visits; there's just one composer's name that sticks vaguely in my mind—something like Lajtha,[2] perhaps—and he paid Nyerges several visits.

Then, during the final days of October, the city gradually quietened down. Less and less gunfire could be heard, and the Russians disappeared from the inner-city areas...

Finally, even Washington understood that it would be worth paying a bit of attention to what was happening in Budapest, and they dispatched the new minister, who had been appointed months before. Tom Wailes flew out from Washington to Vienna, bringing with him the new consul as well. We all drove across to pick them up, and they arrived in Budapest on 2 November.

Prior to that, we had complained to Washington about our lines of communication being interrupted, that regular links were not guaranteed, asking for assistance on this. Wailes had accordingly also brought along a radio technician and a serviceable radio transmitter, so we got rid of that worry at last. The radio was instantly put into service, and we started transmitting messages to Munich.

Tom Wailes was an absolute newcomer to Budapest who had no detailed knowledge of the situation and knew nobody, but at least he was high-ranking, a minister and not merely a chargé d'affaires, and so he had a wider scope of

2 ■ László Lajtha (1892–1963): Composer, ethnomusicologist.

authority, on top of which he was an experienced and skilful diplomat and much more decisive, a better decision-maker than Barnes had been. As soon as he arrived, he called us together for a meeting, listened to our views, then allocated functions and decided what was to be done. That alone made a favourable impression on us colleagues. He didn't have any worries about the radio either, declaring that if the Hungarian authorities or the Russians complained again, the set would be taken over to his residence and operated from there—but, no matter what, we needed to have a communications link. The next morning we assembled anew and again analysed the situation in detail and reconsidered what was to be done. Wailes had a pretty positive impact in those first two days.

November 2nd fell on a Friday, and Wailes only reached Budapest that afternoon, when it was too late to attend to anything. The next day was a Saturday—again not a good time for taking any official action, while Sunday the 4th was the start of the renewed Russian invasion. As best I know, Wailes' intention had been to regularise his position and present his letter of accreditation to Imre Nagy's government that Monday, or some time at the beginning of the week after, but that now fell by the wayside. In all truth, he, too, was caught off guard by suddenly being thrown into the deep end; he was not really prepared for a hot potato like this. He would have liked to display decisiveness, but he was uninformed and, as a result, slow and passive. Perhaps he was overcautious, I don't know—or rather—yes, sadly, he was. That's the truth of it!

For the first few days of November, it was quiet in Budapest, and the mood was pretty buoyant. The Revolution had triumphed, so it seemed. Russians were nowhere to be seen; people were happy; life had started to return to its normal routine. Shops were even being opened here and there, while in many places food was being distributed in the street, having been brought up by the truck load from the provinces, sent as a gift by the country's peasants. Politically, too, the situation was calm; as we saw it then, a general settlement and conciliation could now be in reach. It seemed that under Imre Nagy's leadership a true parliamentary democracy might evolve. Various old and new political parties had appeared, and on 2 November, a Friday, to the best of my recollection, the leaders of the parties presented their platforms on the radio—Kádár himself speaking as leader of the new Communist Party, and also Cardinal Mindszenty. It being on radio, we, too, listened, of course; and on Saturday we sent a report off to Washington, analysing the speeches that had been delivered, summarising our impressions, noting that the general atmosphere was very good and indicating that we, too, saw reason for optimism.

Even as we were doing that, however, bits of bad news had started to come in—on the 2nd. The military attaches recounted that, according to their sources, major concentrations of Russian forces were forming in the eastern part of the country, at Csap, and fresh Russian units were crossing the border coming from the direction of Arad in Romania. We relayed that too to Washington, of course. On Saturday the 3rd, it had reached a point where we no longer dared to hope. The suspicion was now seriously raised that the Russians had only staged a tactical

withdrawal and the current situation would not last very long; the Soviet Union was merely preparing for the next leap forward, which might take place at any moment.

On Saturday evening, Colonel Dallam, the air attaché, came to my room to ask me to make a call to the Hungarian Ministry of Defence. At diplomatic functions he had made the acquaintance of a Hungarian colonel—his name doesn't spring to mind, alas, but I can see his face before me even now, because I had also met him on a number of occasions at official gatherings—and would I try to reach him to ask him for some information. And would I interpret for him, because the attaché hardly spoke any Hungarian. I dialled the Ministry of Defence and actually managed to get through to the colonel. He was at his desk, so I talked with him.

I should note that, to the best of my knowledge, that short, semi-official conversation was the sole contact with the Hungarian government that was not made through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Colonel willingly answered our questions. He told us that our intelligence and suspicions were not entirely baseless, because they, too, were aware that significant Russian armoured forces were being concentrated in the locality of Kiskunfélegyháza and Kecskemét—and he went on to list the particular districts, with numbers, and also reported on the direction in which the Russian units were headed; in other words, he provided a fairly detailed picture. A rather scary picture.

"We have no information about their intentions," he said, "but the indications are that they are aiming to link up around Budapest. The possibility that they are preparing for a renewed attack cannot be discounted!"

That was rather depressing news, to be sure. In the meantime, though, there were talks going on; at that very moment, Defence Minister Maléter was in talks with the Russians.

In short, it was impossible to form a clear-cut view of the situation.

I didn't go home that evening; I stayed in my office, listening to the radio, and fell asleep bent over my desk without even turning the radio off.

I woke up with a start at the crack of dawn to find that the city was reverberating to the thunder of cannon rounds, the crackle of machine-gun fire, a continuous din... And I now heard Imre Nagy's voice, the appeal for help, coming from the radio that I had forgetfully left on.

Then the same message in French, German and English.

The experience was numbing.

Most of my colleagues at the Legation spent that night in their offices. Some went home to sleep, but in general, even they managed to scamper in at dawn on the 4th, before the Russians reached the inner city. Of course, a bunch of strangers also took up refuge there—within the first half hour. American and other Western journalists who had been assigned to Budapest and were staying in the proximity of the Legation—they all hurried over. We hastily gathered together the most essential things, and everyone was sent down into the building's air raid shelter in the cellar, as there was a risk that the building would be subjected to

cannon fire; indeed, if the Russians were unable to make headway against the resistance, there might even be air raids.

In the end, those who did not have pressing duties were given places in the shelter. I was assigned the job of going through the archives and destroying the most sensitive documents, as we had to reckon on the Russians breaking into the Legation and so had to avoid the possibility that confidential correspondence would fall into their hands. We had already moved the code clerk, Gordon Bruegel, from the second to the ground floor, where he was operating the telex machine—lying flat on his belly at that, because we had received occasional rounds from the square outside, and there was no way of knowing when it might happen again—and the archive was in the same room, so I was also there, burning papers. Bruegel was trying to establish a link with Washington and meanwhile was tossing over to me sheaves of old telexes. I was picking the ones to be incinerated when all of a sudden Bruegel leapt to his feet and came over with a piece of paper, a telegram.

"Check this out!"

I read, "The State Department approves of the Budapest mission's granting asylum to Cardinal Mindszenty."

"Bruegel," I said, "please take this straight to the minister and show him, so that he is in a position to take immediate steps should the Cardinal arrive!"

Bruegel raced off. I was only able to get away half an hour later, by which time I knew the cardinal was already in the building. I was told that the minister had only just read the telegram, and a few minutes later there was the Cardinal. Hollywood couldn't have staged it better!

The rest of the day passed with tasks like that—not to mention telephoning around, receiving new arrivals—there were plenty of those. There was a major flap on...

That morning, not long after the Cardinal, there was someone else who came to ask for political asylum: Béla Kovács[3]. It was tough having to tell him that we couldn't grant him that right, as Washington had not assented. With the Cardinal being there already, they may have wanted to avoid pushing things too far; they dared not risk the Cardinal's safety by accepting others, or whatever—I don't know, but the fact is Washington flatly refused the request. We comforted Kovács by saying that even if we could not grant asylum, he was welcome to stay, at least for a few days, until the situation became a little bit clearer, but he didn't stay that long. He spent the rest of the day there, then the next day, at dawn, he and his escort left the Legation building by the rear entrance.

A few days after that, I went home—the apartment was empty, of course, my family being in Vienna, except for the cook, who told me that someone had been asking for me by telephone on the 5th or 6th, saying he was Béla Kovács.

3 ■ Bela Kovacs (1908–1959) was Secretary of the Independent Smallholders' Party after 1945. As he refused to cooperate with the Communists, he was charged in the first big show trial in 1947 and sentenced to a 25 year term. He was released in 1955 and became Minister of Agriculture in Imre Nagy's government formed on 27 October, 1956.

However, he hadn't left any message or phone number, and I didn't know where he was—at home, with friends, or at some other legation. I was very sorry that he had not found me at home, because if he had nowhere else to go, I would have been happy to take him into my own house, on my own responsibility, but as it was there was nothing I could do.

We learned by telephone—that was still back on the 4th—that Imre Nagy and most of his government had fled to the Yugoslav Embassy when the Russian attack was launched. It is something I have thought about a lot since, but if they had sought political asylum with us on November 4th, how would Washington have reacted? I believe that we might have given them shelter. Under the circumstances, we possibly would not have refused that to a revolutionary government and the head of that government. But then, that's just my private opinion—sheer guesswork. What somewhat speaks against it is the refusal given to Kovács; for, when it comes down to it he was also a member of the government. But maybe if they had made an appeal to us collectively, as the Hungarian government, then just possibly, at least for the first few days. Hard to say...

I have also thought a lot after the fact about why we only took in Cardinal Mindszenty, and him alone, and how was it that his case had already been settled in advance, before he had even got there? Many years later, I asked a number of high-ranking State Department officials about this, but none of them gave me a clear answer. During the Sixties, I also met up in Washington with Bob Murphy, who was an assistant secretary of state at the time and had the desk for Hungarian affairs. I asked him, too, whether he remembered who had given the instruction in the matter of granting the Cardinal the right of asylum. He said that it had not been him, and so many matters had passed through his hands at the time that he could not possibly recollect who had proposed, and who approved, the cardinal's right to asylum. One of my colleagues at the State Department did not have a particularly high post, but he had a close familiarity with conditions in Hungary, having already served several years in Budapest when I got there in 1953, and stayed on with me for quite a few months until I had fully settled into my duties. He was a Roman Catholic and, what's more, quite possibly knew the Cardinal, so I have a sneaking suspicion that he might have been the person who set the whole thing in motion in Washington. I have asked him point-blank on several occasions since then, but he was evasive, saying that he didn't know who made the arrangements. Still, to this day, I can't get it out of my head that his hand might have been behind it. I also talked it over with Bruegel, the code clerk who received the telegram, but all he remembered was that the permission arrived by telegram, not telex, and it was encrypted. As to which State Department desk had sent it—that he could no longer recall. As far as Bruegel recollected, we had already asked Washington quite a bit earlier, back in October, what we were to do if a Hungarian politician were to ask the Legation for political asylum, but we received no answer. Yet, this telegram had arrived at the Legation without the question being raised, and practically within an hour of the Russian attack being launched.

After November 4th, at first it seemed that the end was going to come any moment, that the Russian invasion had drawn the Hungarian Revolution to a close within hours. However, it did not quite happen like that: the fighting went on for days, several days, in Budapest. We had logged up ultimate defeat within minutes, whereas the Hungarians had still not given up the cause.

Visitors still arrived in a continual stream at the Legation, and telephone calls came in—usually with news that resistance was continuing at this place and that, above all, perhaps, in the factories. I remember there was someone who called in from Újpest—on several occasions, using an assumed name—and gave us regular reports on what was happening at factories in the district, what the mood was like, what they were trying to achieve. I wouldn't say he sounded exactly upbeat, but he did not give the impression that the game was already over.

As far as conditions on the streets permitted, I, too, prowled around the city. My job was to inform myself as best I could about the strength and location of the Russian military forces—which was hardly worth the trouble as there were plenty of them all over the place. What was far more intriguing was a day when, on the basis of a telephone call—this must have been well into the middle of the month, or even late November—Rogers and I went off to the Budapest Workers' Council headquarters in Akácfa Street, where the factory workers' leaders conferred. I went along principally to interpret for Rogers, but in the end, there was not much need for me, because one of their men spoke English quite well, and they managed without me. Still, it was an extraordinary experience, meeting these workers. It became clear that even that late in the day their organizing activities were still in full swing, and the factories were still under their control. They declared in no uncertain terms that they were not surrendering anything. The fight was going on!

Naturally, we reported all this to Washington, though by then it hardly mattered what we were reporting...

A women's protest march was being organized for early December. I learned about it through seeing uniformed Russian soldiers going around stuffing leaflets in the letterboxes of houses in Buda and then managing to acquire one. On it was printed: "Ladies, Hungarian mothers! Don't go demonstrating, stay at home!"—something of that sort. I don't know what happened with the demonstration, because Rogers and I went off to Vienna on December 6th in order to see our families, whom we had last seen on October 29th, and I was away for several days.

As time passed, however, the picture that emerged was increasingly one of a defeated revolution. The daily news, too, was more and more taken up with events that related to reprisals. I saw one or two episodes with my own eyes—all I had to do was look out of my apartment window! Late one evening—it would have been getting on for 11 o'clock—we were getting ready to turn in for the night when we heard two shots close at hand. A section of the Academy of Sciences was located on Voroshilov Avenue, almost next door, so I looked out of the window and saw people being hustled into cars in the dark street. The next day, I learned

from our concierge that some students who had taken part in the uprising had taken refuge there, and it was they who were being picked up and dragged away.

Then I watched as Russian soldiers and Hungarian Party members went from house to house just before March 15th to haul out the janitors and get them to take down any flags in the national colours or black...

The Kádár government made the allegation that the insurgents had been given, and made use of, American weapons; that we had fomented and backed the uprising. The accusation had not the slightest foundation. I never saw any American arms in use during the Revolution; in all cases, the insurgents made use of Russian-manufactured weapons which were obtained from the Hungarian army's depots and the Lámpagyár, an electric bulb works that had been converted to manufacture Russian-model weapons.

Árpád Precsényi

Corvin Close, Budapest, 29 October 1956.

Safe-keeping of the Legation building was taken care of by the American Marine Corps—eight of them altogether, as I recall. Naturally, they had weapons, but they weren't allowed out on the street in uniform, let alone armed. There were no other American weapons in Hungary—or at most, nothing more than my own gun, which I never used and never even got out. No, I thought to myself, that's not for me. When it looked possible that the Russians might force their way into the Legation, I took my pistol into the cellar, loosened a brick in the wall and hid the blameless implement there. I had no need for it. It could only lead to trouble!

Not only did I not see any American weapons in Budapest, I also never heard of anything like that being brought into the country. While the fighting was in

progress, Hungarian insurgents dropped in more than once to ask for weapons, and what they urgently needed was anti-tank guns. "We don't need American soldiers. Just give us weapons, send us weapons! We can take care of the Russians on our own, as long as we have weapons!" But then, what had we to give them?

"If it was down to me personally, I'd be happy to give you them. But here at the Legation we don't have any weapons at all. All I can do is relay your request."

In short, Western weapons played no part in the Revolution, because they didn't exist in Hungary, and none were brought into Hungary. As to whether it was right not to bring in any guns—that's another question. Russian guns and Russian soldiers positively poured over the eastern border, so why would it have been so unimaginable, or such a terrible crime, for us to help out the better of the parties, at least with weapons? In Germany, there were abundant stocks of American weapons that could have been brought over, but they brought nothing over. I even know of an arsenal in West Germany in which were stockpiled weapons of Russian manufacture that had been captured during the Korean War, so if we had wanted to keep it quiet, we could have brought in some of those. No one would have caught on to the fact that they had come from the West. However, even that came to nothing. There was also a corps of Hungarian volunteers in West Germany, not an insignificant force and fully armed. They were only waiting for the authorization to set off for Hungary—an authorization that was never given.

Sure, to bring in weapons or military forces, or even to allow Hungarian units to enter Hungary—that was a pretty serious political issue that could only have been decided with a due sense of responsibility. Nor am I well aware enough what is at issue to be able to express an opinion. It may well be it was right, under the circumstances, that we should not have resorted to military assistance. Only I have a feeling that the reason we did not give military assistance to the Hungarian Revolution was not because America's leaders decided that it was wrong, but because they didn't come to any sort of decision. In other words, Washington did not even seriously entertain this obvious possibility—at least, I have no information suggesting that this was considered at all. I'm not criticizing the fact that they didn't bring any weapons or American forces into Hungary, but I do think it was an error that this was not even raised as a possibility in Washington.

They sat idly by as Hungarian blood was being shed, calmly looked on as superior Russian forces trampled the glorious revolution underfoot.

The eight marines who did duty in the Legation couldn't wear their uniform, but that didn't stop them from going out into town in their civvies. There was no holding them back! They went off to the Kilián Barracks, even had themselves photographed with the freedom fighters, and they practically begged to be allowed to go off in uniform to help the Hungarians. "The Russians only need to give us Marines one look, and they'll be taking to their heels!" This spontaneous fervour obviously did not have much grounding in reality, but it was characteristic of the spirit of our military personnel.

And it is true that the Russians were scared. Their morale was not too high; all the signs showed that they had little appetite for a fight—not even against the Hungarians, let alone Americans! If they had encountered even a tiny, symbolic American force on the side of the Hungarian Revolution, I don't think they would have dared accept battle against it. It would have been easy to reverse the course of events. But then...

It would have been possible to help in other ways, at least through diplomatic channels. If the significance of the Hungarian Revolution, and the opportunities that it offered, had been assessed seriously and without delay in Washington, there is a lot that could have been done. At the very least, the United States could have immediately made contact with the Imre Nagy government—that alone would have meant a great deal in the international arena, and it would have seriously deterred the Russians from armed intervention. If a high-ranking representative of the American government had been dispatched to Budapest straight away, in late October, the situation would have looked very different. That aside, there was the possibility of acting through the United Nations. If a UN delegation had been put together as soon as news first came in about the events, and had been sent in to put together an internationally monitored ceasefire, it would have been possible to stabilize the situation, to hold events at the point when the Revolution was victorious. However, none of these things happened.

"What would have happened if..."—that's just daydreaming, isn't it, fruitless speculation. And it's easy to be clever in hindsight...

Two factors played a tragically grave role here. First, those of us who were in the Legation in Budapest were totally caught up with events in Hungary; that's all we were paying any attention to, but Washington wasn't, because the hoopla around the Suez crisis was going on at precisely that time. On top of that, a presidential election was on. America was paying far more attention to that than to Budapest.

Second, America did not trust Imre Nagy. From Washington's point of view, Nagy was simply a Communist, and they didn't notice that this was no longer the point; it wasn't about that. For Washington, it appeared uncertain how long Nagy would manage to stay in power in the wake of the Revolution, and even if on the surface he did stay, the direction in which he would take the new Hungary appeared unclear. It appeared questionable to what degree the revolutionary government enjoyed the population's trust and to what extent the Hungarian people approved of and wanted this political line—in other words, to what extent the uprising could be a basis for a stable future. After the event, of course, one can only say that these uncertainties all sprang from failures of assessment, for on November 4th unambiguous answers were given to all these questions. Events retrospectively endorsed Imre Nagy, but by then it was too late.

I think that if we had been given a little more time, just another week, and Nagy had carried on along the chosen path—and I'm quite sure he would have—then, we would have had better grounds to trust him and most likely would have done so. The Russians, though, were careful not to allow any time for that to happen. Or if we had known that Nagy had sent a telegram to the UN asking for assistance—

the telegram somehow went astray in New York, or was stolen, there's no knowing what; it only came to light much later—but if we had known about the telegram, then we would have had an opportunity to declare our support immediately...

If, if, if...

The instructions we had from Washington were to maintain a distance from the Nagy government and wait—wait to see what course things took. Most definitely, Washington was not advising us, for the time being, to make any gesture that would have amounted to, or signalled, recognition of the Nagy government; but we should be open and, if the occasion arose, friendly, so as not to close the door too firmly. I have to say that Washington's instructions were not entirely explicit, not exactly precise. The usual response that was given to any question we raised was "What do you think?" We would then attempt to steer by this and kept on writing our reports, which wouldn't always reach Washington on time...

One thing is for sure: no direct contact was made between the Legation and the Nagy government. I can state that with complete certainty, because if such a contact had been made, then either Nyerges would have interpreted, or more likely me, because there was no one else in the mission who spoke Hungarian. There was not so much as a telephone conversation between the Minister and Imre Nagy. I know that quite definitely, and I also know nothing about any serious request that might have been addressed to us from Nagy by letter. What little contact there was went via the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There were a few exchanges of insignificant notes with the Ministry, but these were only on routine topics and did not amount to anything on which more substantial relations could have been based. The passivity was on both sides: just as we didn't seek to make contact with the Imre Nagy government, neither did they approach us.

It is conceivable that attempts to do this were made on their part, but if that was the case, then the initiative could only have come laboriously and tentatively through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—and got blocked there. It stands to reason that an act of rapprochement like that would have had to pass through several pairs of hands within the Foreign Ministry, and I suspect that even in late October there would have been a number of covert old-style Communists who had the opportunity to purloin a letter of that nature, to throw a wrench in the works. It's not that I know anything definite. There were more than a few Hungarians who dropped in on us, not just with information, but with the aim of giving us advice of a political nature, pleading for us to take action, to intervene somehow; however, these were all private individuals and not one of them represented the Nagy government in any official capacity. István Bibó[4], then a secretary of state, visited on one occasion, but that too was only on November 4th, when in reality he alone represented the Hungarian government, all the others being at the Yugoslav Embassy, incapable of

4 ■ Istvan Bibo (1911–1979) legal scholar, sociologist, arguably the foremost Hungarian legal theorist and political thinker of the 20th century. He held the post of minister of state in Imre Nagy's government in 1956, issuing a proclamation calling for passive resistance on the day of the Soviet attack on 4 November. He was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in 1958 and amnestied in 1963.

action—in other words, when for all practical purposes the Nagy government no longer existed. I suspect that there was at least as much confusion and muddle in Parliament during those days as there was at the Legation. During the first few days of November we actually did not even know where Imre Nagy was—or at least, we didn't know officially. He was in the Parliament building, of course, but even that could only be picked up by word of mouth. We could have found him if we had wished, but we didn't want to. Washington did not want that.

I should add that the missions of the other Western countries were nothing like as cautious, stiff and aloof as we were. Both during the fighting and afterwards, still in November, we were in fairly close contact with the other Western missions—the British, French, Italians, Egyptians, Turks—frequently telephoning one another, exchanging intelligence, comparing appraisals of the situation. I recall clearly that the British, for instance, were far more unequivocal in their support for Imre Nagy than we were. Or the Indians; they were extremely active, and even after November 4th they were very eager to give some sort of diplomatic support to the Hungarian Revolution. The Indian ambassador even came to pay a call on Wailes. I remember because I took a photograph of them—but that's of no matter, it had no significance. It seems that even the more positive attitude shown by the others had no influence on the American line and was unable to allay Washington's suspicion and passivity.

After November 4th we were also in contact with the Yugoslav Embassy. I was acquainted with a few of the Hungarian speakers who worked there, and I called them up; our minister, too, spoke with the Yugoslav ambassador by phone. We wished to be assured that at least the accommodation, meals and personal safety of those members of the Hungarian government who had taken refuge there were being taken care of. I can't remember that any other subject was raised—a diplomatic action plan or anything of that kind. We did not offer that we might, perhaps, take over responsibility for the Hungarian politicians who had sought refuge there. It's quite certain that no such notion was broached.

Nevertheless, the Yugoslavs were not all that communicative either—in response to our inquiries, we got polite, but succinct answers—that they had found a satisfactory way of accommodating the Hungarians, their meals were being taken care of, there were no particular problems. The only thing they added was that they did not see any way of being able to alter their position for the time being, because the situation was fairly tense, what with the Russians keeping them under observation, their being surrounded...

So when, at the end of November, the Russians succeeded in tricking Nagy and his group out of the Yugoslav Embassy and spiriting them away, again no genuine action was taken on the part of America. But then, what could have been done, when they abducted a government that we didn't even recognize?

In February 1957, we again started to put on diplomatic functions: from October 23rd until mid-February there was little chance to do so as the evening curfew also applied to us; and if we had driven around the city after dark, the Russians would

have fired on us, too. By the middle of February, however, the city had quietened down enough for us to venture out and discuss what had happened in more detail and under circumstances that were more normal. At one of these functions, I met a Yugoslav embassy official who had been present when Imre Nagy's group was carried off and had even got into a scuffle with the Russians. He had injured his hand in the process. We were moved to hear the story, but then these recollections and accounts of experiences were truly of no practical significance whatever by then.

From early 1957 onwards, opportunities to take a look around outside the capital also gradually opened up again. I was very curious to find out what the mood was like in the country and went as soon as possible... The ÁVO were rather slow in pulling themselves together again, and they had many things to attend to, so for quite a long time they were not keeping too close an eye on diplomats.

It seems almost incredible, but on the last day of 1956 quite a large contingent of us went off hunting, taking a number of cars and a whole bunch of dogs, out towards Vecsés, a village on the south-east outskirts of Budapest.

There was a train station there where the Russians had set up an improvised camp in which they were collecting young freedom fighters whom they had captured and putting them in railway wagons. Along the railway embankment, the locals used to pick up slips of paper that the prisoners tossed out of the trains that were setting off for Russia, and the peasants then mailed the messages on. They showed me some of the letters. They also told a story about one of the Russian officers unwilling to carry out orders and dispatch the train. He had been put up against the station wall and shot on the spot.

There was a radio mast there, too, a jamming station, with the Russian tank tracks readily visible on the thin snow cover around it. I was a little apprehensive, and indeed said that it might not be too clever to be strolling around the area with guns. The Russians might come back any moment, and then what...

"Ah! To hell with the Russians! We're not scared of them; they're scared of us!" was how the Hungarians shrugged it off.

We went on. We bagged a heap of hares and pheasants, but that wasn't enough for them. It was already growing dark, and thus time to go back, when my Vizsla-breeding friend said:

"Let's go back to the radio mast! You'll see, there'll be plenty of hares behind the radio station!"

I tried reasoning that if the Russians were to hear shooting, they would return and wouldn't ask too many questions, but nobody paid any notice. And the Vizsla man was right. We took away a considerable number of hares from there.

We even had an audience, with people coming out from the nearby settlement to help with the beating and cheer us on. I gave thanks to the Almighty when it had grown completely dark, leaving us no choice but to abandon the hair-raising game.

The general impression that these excursions made on me was that Hungarians, indeed, had no fear: whatever might happen, people were not afraid.

There was one occasion when we went down to the area round Makó—perhaps in the autumn of '57. A twelve-year-old boy came along with us, the son of the local gamekeeper. As we were making our way back along the forest road at the end of the hunt, with the hunters launching into some of those splendid sad old songs like "If I go out past the cemetery" or "The sun is setting now", the boy piped up as we tramped:

"This is where my father shot the tyres off the Russian car!"

"A Russian car's tyres?—wasn't he afraid?"

"No," the kid says, "because he was really angry! Because the Russians had come and flushed out all the pheasants from their cover, then shot them down with machine guns. Well, that's not sportsmanlike! So, one evening my father lay in wait for them and shot their tyres out. Dead scared the Russkies were as well. They didn't stop, but raced off with the wrecked wheel. The jeep almost turned turtle!"

Everywhere I went, I found that the Hungarian sense of self-respect was unscathed. Their revolution may have been put down, themselves trampled underfoot, but their sense of self-respect was intact. Nor did they give up their resistance, even though the reprisals were ferocious. A lot of people called in on the Legation—desperate, pleading for us to try and help. I remember one instance, for example, that of a freedom fighter by the name of Iván Kovács, who had been condemned to death, and his family came and wept—but, of course, there was nothing we could do. Iván Kovács was executed.

I am a Reformed-Church Protestant by faith, and I attended divine service on a fairly regular basis—in 1957, usually at the church in the Pasarét district of Buda. I got to know the pastor as well, Dr Sándor Joó, an admirable man who delivered marvellous sermons, generally from the Bible, but always with a message behind the words—words of solace and encouragement. So many people came to listen to his sermons that they were often standing outside in the street, in front of the church. On one occasion, I noticed that at the end of the service Joó made a sign for me not to leave, as he wanted to speak with me. I stayed on, waiting for the throng to disperse and hanging on as he talked about something with an elderly couple. They were both crying, I could see. The pastor then turned to me, "It was them I wanted to show to you. Their son was still under age when he was captured in December, but he reached his eighteenth birthday recently. They waited for that, and now they have executed him."

There were a lot of heart-rending cases like that at the time.

We returned to Washington in December 1957; then in 1962, I took my leave from the State Department as well. I had no choice, because by the late Fifties or early Sixties, interest in Hungary—and Eastern Europe more generally—had declined to such a low level that there was simply no work for me. I no longer had a role. I would have been willing to go on representing the cause of the Hungarian Revolution, because I believed that huge potential still resided in the defeated Revolution which could be exploited vis à vis the Russians, as they had achieved

only a military victory, not a psychological one, and in Eastern Europe they did not enjoy the trust of the masses one bit. However, government circles in Washington would have none of it, and that has not changed in essence to the present day. Well, after a few years I gave up the hopeless struggle and resigned from my job. I switched to business and went into marketing, selling school equipment, educational packages.

I'm a private individual who has nothing to do with politics, except for one thing: ever since then I have always done everything within my power to ensure that the memory of 1956 is not forgotten. I think that those of us who witnessed and lived through it have a duty, until we die, to keep on shaking the world up, to jog memories time and time again about what happened in Hungary.

Since 1957, I have been back to Hungary only once. In 1972, I paid a return visit with my family. Our fourth child, my daughter, was born while I was working in Budapest—not in Budapest, but in Vienna, as I took my wife to the American military hospital in Vienna to give birth. Anyway, I always promised my daughter that when she finished high school, we would make a trip to Europe, and I would take her round her native city. Well, so it happened. We stayed for a longer spell in Vienna. By then the cardinal was living there, and I paid a visit on him, too; then, I hired a Volkswagen and we hopped over to Hungary for a week.

It was a strange feeling to see Budapest again. The city had changed a lot, grown unfamiliar. The traffic in the streets was much busier. That, too, was an uncomfortable feeling. There was no way of telling if you were being followed. We paid visits on a few old friends, like our ageing cook, which was good, but there were many old acquaintances whom we could no longer trace. We dropped in on the Legation as well, but I no longer knew anyone there, and they didn't pay much attention to me, so I felt pretty lost. The only person still there from the former staff was an old Hungarian whom I found in the consulate section and the old janitor. I had a bit of a chat with them. By that time I had not had contact with the State Department for a long while; I had made the trip as a simple private individual, wishing to do nothing more than take a holiday. To begin with, I could not believe there would be any reason for me to be kept under surveillance; but then, a nagging suspicion well and truly took root in me, and that bothered me a lot. A person would like to be able to regard his hotel room as a temporary home, but if you continually have to bear in mind that walls can have ears...

My wife was so upset by it all that she doesn't really want to go back now. I'd maybe like to have one more look around, but even so, it would not be with the old pleasure, that's for sure.

For a while I kept up a correspondence with a few dear friends in Budapest, but now they, too, are all gradually dying off...

I am in contact with just two of my American ex-colleagues. One of them is the code clerk, Bruegel; he stops by from time to time, and we chat about the Revolution and shared experiences. He was here quite recently and was recollecting just

how exciting a time those hours had been when he was operating the telex machine while stretched flat on his belly, with fighting going on outside, the window-panes shattered and us not knowing when a Russian tank might loose a shell on us...

The other one is a marine who was a guard in the Legation and developed a real fixation on the Hungarian Revolution. He's been with the Marines ever since, and even had three tours of duty in Vietnam, but each time he returned, he would always travel back home via Vienna in order to be at least close to Budapest. If he happens to be at home in America around October time, he always takes advantage of the chance to attend '56 memorial evenings and give a talk, to tell about his experiences, the Revolution. I usually bump into him around that time and have a chat...

Once I was back in America, I slowly came to learn plenty of facts—from written documents and the accounts of others—stuff that at the time, in the thick of the events in Hungary, I could not have known about. And these bits of data serve only to reinforce the impression I had at the time that the Russians were scared, running scared. Because the Hungarian Revolution raised a big question mark about the future of the entire Soviet world empire. The whole of Eastern Europe, including Russia itself, might have gone up in flames from the spark.

I have looked at reports about complete panic in the Romanian Communist Party, in the leadership—where one would least have expected it!—that the Central Committee put on what was almost a last supper before the final flight...

I learned to what extent the Communist regime was on a knife edge in East Germany, Poland and even Czechoslovakia during the Revolution...

I made the acquaintance of a Hungarian student who had fled Hungary after the Revolution was defeated, but beforehand had been attending university in Moscow. Even though he went on to serve in the American Army, he was always treated with a certain wariness, simply because he had come from Moscow. People thought he might be a Communist agent, despite the fact that he was an honest fellow and had important knowledge. He told me what the mood had been like among Russian students in '56. And that if revolutionary Hungary had managed to stay on its feet, then...

The young man told me that in the summer of 1956, he had run across an American professor in Moscow and had explained to him, too, in detail, how combustible the atmosphere was in Russia. I didn't spare any effort until I had dug the professor's report out from the archives in Washington, and in it, I found exactly the same things, including mention of a Hungarian student met in the bar...

It was the same everywhere—what I had seen in Budapest. That in the autumn of 1956, the Russians were seriously fearful of ultimate collapse. And they had good reason to be fearful.

Well, we ought to have been aware of these facts! And we ought to have thought them through! Tragically, it was a major oversight on our part.

What was so splendid about it all was that the Hungarians were not afraid. The Russians were afraid. And there lay the massive opportunity. That's why it was a big mistake—a big, big mistake—that we, too, were afraid. We shouldn't have been. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Charles Gati

Fifty Years Later

You must not deprive a people of their illusions.

Count Kunó Klebelsberg, Hungary's minister of culture in the 1920s, denying a historian permission to publish newly discovered documents showing that a much-admired hero of the 1848–49 Hungarian revolution against Austria was an Austrian agent.

Reduced to its essentials, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution parallels the story of David and Goliath. Oppressed for a decade by the Soviet Union and its local Communist acolytes, Hungarians rose to assert their right to independent existence. The Revolution consumed both the Kremlin and world opinion, but it failed; after thirteen days of high drama, of hope and despair, the mighty Red Army prevailed. The Hungarian government surrendered, its members arrested, kidnapped, or co-opted. The Soviet empire survived, the Cold War continued. Soon enough, the cautious, post-Stalin search for détente resumed. Though in its 1956 year-end issue *Time* magazine honoured the Hungarian freedom fighter as its Man of the Year, by the end of 1957 the choice fell on the Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev, also known as the "Butcher of Budapest".

Fifty years later, a more complex story can be told, one that contradicts neither Hungarian heroism nor Soviet brutality. The opening of most Hungarian and many Russian archives since the collapse of communism, and greater access to secret American documents, point to a more differentiated picture of who did what, how, and why and in particular, why the 1956 revolt failed. The coincidence of new evidence and the passing of time make a partial reassessment of many aspects of 1956 both possible and imperative. Of course, Khrushchev and his cohorts cannot be exonerated or vindicated, but what they knew and what they feared can now be better understood and better explained.

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As for the record of the United States, it turns out to have been far worse than previously known. New information shows how disingenuous the United States was when it kept the Hungarians' hopes alive—without making any preparations at all to help them either militarily or diplomatically. The initials "NATO" could summarize its approach: No Action, Talk Only. The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration's official declaratory policy of rollback and liberation, including the passing of politically inspired and self-satisfying "Captive Nations" resolutions, amounted to hypocrisy mitigated only by self-delusion. The more evident goal was to satisfy the far-right wing of the Republican Party led by Senator Joseph McCarthy and roll back the Democrats from Capitol Hill—rather than liberate Central and Eastern Europe from Soviet domination. During the revolt itself, Radio Free Europe (RFE) kept encouraging its Hungarian listeners to keep fighting for *all* they sought and more—whether those goals were realistic or not.

The passing of time makes it also less compelling to view Hungarian bravery uncritically—without considering the choices they made. In particular, it is not necessary, if it ever was, to endorse everything they did, including the pursuit of maximalist demands that united the Kremlin's different factions against them. Moved by understandable fury against their Communist oppressors in Moscow and in Budapest, the insurgents neglected to contemplate the likely consequences of their actions. Much as their romantic idealism was so appealing, it was also unwise. And even if the young fighters could not, and should not have been expected to be, politically adept, shrewd or calculating, older and presumably more experienced hands in the new government should have insisted that the rebels temper their youthful enthusiasm. Despite repeated talks between them, there is no evidence that members of Imre Nagy's revolutionary government ever asked young freedom fighters to look at a map, consider where the Soviet Union was—and, in view of geopolitical realities, exercise restraint. Granted the goodwill and patriotism of Nagy and his colleagues and recognizing that guiding history's first major anti-Soviet revolution to victory was a most difficult, perhaps even a hopeless, task—there is still no need to obscure their bungling performance.

In the past, the most widely known scholarly accounts of the behaviour of the Hungarians,[1] and also to a lesser extent that of the United States,[2] were respectful and restrained—criticism was offered even toward the United States sotto voce—so as not to divert attention from Soviet culpability and Hungarian bravery. After all, it was widely believed, Washington, in contrast to Moscow, could be blamed only for reckless idealism and the Hungarians for excessive zeal and naiveté. Fifty years later, Americans and Hungarians alike should be ready to take a more realistic, and therefore more self-critical, look at what they did, how their mistakes contributed to the Revolution's downfall—and what else they could have done.

1 ■ See, e.g., Ferenc A. Váli, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary: Nationalism versus Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961); and Paul E. Zinner, *Revolution in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

2 ■ Bennett Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation: East-Central Europe in U.S. Diplomacy and Politics since 1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

Such debatable, and indeed controversial, conclusions rest on four seldom-stressed facts and considerations:

First, relatively few Hungarians actually fought against Soviet rule, and their ultimate goal was to reform the system, not to abolish it. In a country of less than 10 million, those who took up arms against the Soviet oppressors numbered no more than 15,000 (although practically all Hungarians stood shoulder to shoulder with them). Because the Revolution's main objective was independence from the Soviet Union, the freedom fighters were deeply nationalist, anti-Soviet, and anti-Russian—but not anti-socialist. To the extent that they had a chance to develop a common political platform, it was a mix of independent communism as seen in Tito's Yugoslavia, West European social democracy and, perhaps, what came to be known twelve years later in Czechoslovakia as "socialism with a human face". Indeed, one of the few remaining mysteries of 1956 is how the Revolution absorbed reformist goals.

Second, the Revolution lacked effective leadership. On 23 October, 1956, when the revolt began, the crowd, composed of students and demonstrating peacefully, demanded Imre Nagy's return to power. The students admired him for what he had done as the country's reform-minded, anti-Stalinist prime minister in 1953–55, but they did not know very much about him; they did not know that he had collaborated with the Soviet secret police in Moscow in the 1930s, that it was the Soviet Politburo that appointed him as head of Hungary's Communist government in June 1953, and that he was dismissed at the urging of the same Soviet Politburo in April 1955.

During the first few days of the revolt, Nagy disappointed his followers. Reinstated as prime minister, he initially opposed the freedom fighters' demands. Then, in effect going from one extreme to another in a few days, he fully embraced even the most radical demands—without telling the insurgents that quitting the Warsaw Pact and declaring Hungary's neutrality would almost certainly invite a Soviet military crackdown. Nagy's fearless, uncompromising behaviour before a kangaroo court that sentenced him to death in 1958 should not obscure the fact that, however well-meaning he was, he lacked the political skill to make the Revolution victorious; in particular, he failed to steer his country between the freedom fighters' maximalist expectations and Moscow's minimalist requirements.

Third, the Soviet leadership in Moscow was not trigger-happy. Too much should not be made of the Kremlin's interest in finding a political, rather than a military solution to the crisis. Every imperialist country prefers to get what it wants peacefully, without bloodshed. In this sense, no reappraisal is in order, because what matters in the end is what Moscow did rather than the alternatives it considered. Still, the Soviet Politburo's now-available deliberations suggest that if Nagy had led rather than followed—if he had calibrated the insurgents' demands and then convinced Moscow that its own interests would be better served by granting his government a modicum of autonomy—Hungary, in exchange for supporting Soviet foreign policy, might have obtained limited pluralism at home.

This possibility—admittedly only a possibility—takes account of the Revolution occurring against the background of three realities. The first, in 1955, was the surprising Soviet decision to withdraw its military from Austria, Hungary's western neighbour, which allowed that country to embrace neutrality between East and West, as well as pluralism and free-market economics at home. The second critical reality was the historic Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, at which Khrushchev denounced Stalin, anticipating substantial changes in international communism. The third reality, favouring Soviet concessions, was the fact that Hungary—unlike Poland, where anti-Soviet sentiments were also rising—had little or no strategic significance for the Kremlin. Thus, if Hungarian demands had been less radical, Khrushchev might have allowed Hungary to evolve toward semi-independent existence so that, if necessary, he could deal with Poland more effectively and at the same time protect his anti-Stalinist platform at home.

Fourth, the United States was both uninformed and misinformed about the prospects for change—even as its propaganda was very provocative. Documents made available to me in 2005, under a Freedom of Information Act request by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), reveal that the outbreak of the 1956 revolt took Washington by surprise. Evan Thomas disclosed several years ago that in Vienna, the nearest Western European capital, the CIA had no Hungarian-speaking official.[3] The U.S. Legation in Budapest had but one fluent Hungarian speaker who, during the Revolution, was busy accepting petitions from various Hungarian groups and individuals.[4] Earlier in the 1950s, the CIA did not have an active program in or toward Hungary, which was assigned the lowest priority among the satellites of Central and Eastern Europe.[5] Some (though not all) the information available to the U.S. government about Hungarian domestic conditions came from pro-fascist Hungarian exiles in West Germany and Austria whose contacts at home were missing the main story of the mid-1950s: that the most promising opposition to the Stalinist dictatorship came not from the country's oppressed, unhappy citizens, but from Nagy and his anti-Stalinist supporters in or close to the governing elite, many of them disillusioned Communists.

3 ■ Evan Thomas, "A Singular Opportunity: Gaining Access to CIA's Records," *Studies in Intelligence* 39, no. 5 (1996): 19–23.

4 ■ The CIA declined to identify him. As it turns out, however, the man is question is alive and well. He is Geza Katona, eighty-eight years of age as this is written in 2005, and he lives in a Washington suburb. In a lengthy telephone interview with me on the record on August 27, 2005, he related his experiences as a CIA officer in Budapest, working under official cover, from 1952 to late 1957. Katona was born in the United States of Hungarian parents. In his inaccurate, misleading and biased book, David Irving identifies Gaza *[sic]* Katona as a U.S. diplomat serving in Budapest; see *Uprising!* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981). [See Zsolt Csalog's interview with Katona on pp. 109–131 of this issue—The Editor].

5 ■ "Hungary, along with the Balkan satellites, had the lowest priority. Indicative is the fact that there were no Hungarian-speaking case officers" at critical places. CIA, *Clandestine Services Historical Series (CSHP 323): Hungary External Operations 1946–1965* (MORI DocID: 1161462; parts declassified at my request in December 2004), 82.

Radio Free Europe (RFE)—the unofficial voice of America—did reach many Hungarian listeners and readers, too. As part of its psychological-warfare program, at times called Operation Focus, RFE launched helium-filled balloons over Hungary that dropped, among others, a cartoon identifying Nagy as the Kremlin's stooge—saying in effect that when you've seen one Commie, you've seen them all. In broadcasts to its huge and receptive Hungarian audience, RFE should have cautiously supported Nagy's reformist course in 1953–55 but did not; it should have enthusiastically, and with great effect, supported Nagy during the second week of the revolt, but did not. RFE failed to encourage a gradualist, "Titoist", or simply anti-Stalinist outcome that had a chance, however slim, to succeed; instead, it egged on the most radical insurgent groups to fight on until all their demands were met. In the end, and tragically, the United States did not find the proper balance between the admirable goal of keeping the Hungarians' hopes alive and the dubious goal of encouraging them to fight a hopeless battle against the Soviet Union.

Thus, the proper question, then and now, is not why the United States refused to fight for Hungary in what could have become the Third World War. The proper question is why the United States refused to press through its propaganda outlets and diplomatic channels for realistic if small gains.

Why wasn't something better than nothing?

Because there is a link between the subject and the author, it may be useful to disclose more about my background and about what I thought then of what I witnessed.

I began my journalistic career in 1953, when the daily *Magyar Nemzet* hired me as a cub reporter. At the age of eighteen, I was the youngest member of the staff. Why Iván Boldizsár, the editor-in-chief, offered me a job remains something of a mystery. Just out of high school with poor grades, I had neither any work experience, nor a college education. I could produce no clippings that would have helped him evaluate my skills as a journalist. I submitted no references. I had no pull, no connections. I was not a member of the Communist Party. Of neither working-class, nor peasant stock, I did not qualify under the Communist version of affirmative action. (Classified as a petit-bourgeois, my father used to own a small electrical supply store that was closed by the Nazis in 1944 and confiscated by the Communists in 1948.)

During my hour-long interview, which came about as a result of a brief hand-written letter to Boldizsár, I do not recall saying anything wise or witty. I told him that while I lacked proper academic and political credentials, I was nevertheless a born reporter: curious, critical and a good writer. "Are you a socialist?" he asked. Not knowing exactly what he wanted to hear, I mumbled, opportunistically, "I'd like to be." He nodded and smiled. Mindful of changing political winds after Stalin's death, and of the recent appointment of the anti-Stalinist Nagy as prime minister, he might have wanted a non-party youngster

on the staff. More likely, perhaps, I happened to apply for a position just when he was authorized to hire a neophyte.

I was assigned to the cultural desk to do pre-publication and pre-production interviews with writers, playwrights, actors, painters, composers and musicians. From the beginning, I loved my job and the status that went with it. From the flunky I was in high school a few short months before, I had jumped to the staff of the country's second largest and only prestigious national daily, written and edited for the non-Communist intelligentsia. I had a free pass to the Opera, two free tickets to concerts held at the famous Liszt Academy of Music, and, in the course of my work, I met practically all the leading figures of the world of film and theatre, including quite a few of the incredibly attractive actresses of my adolescent fantasies.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the circumstances of life in mid-century Hungary defied exact categories and easy definitions.

My two years at *Magyar Nemzet*—I was hired in 1953 and fired in 1955—coincided with Nagy's first premiership. The new prime minister was very popular among my colleagues at the paper. He wanted to decentralise the economy, rather than privatise it. He favoured socialist legality, which in plain language meant less repression, rather than the introduction of the rule of law. He sought a more humane political order, with a small party or two playing a supporting role, rather than a Western-style multi-party democracy. He hoped that the Patriotic People's Front, which became the formal sponsor of *Magyar Nemzet* and was run by Ferenc Jánosi, his son-in-law, would become a new centre of power, checking the Communist Party's dominant position without undermining its so-called leading role. I heard that he was a Titoist or a National Communist, but I did not know at the time what that really meant, except that it was far more promising than what we had under the Stalinist Mátyás Rákosi. It goes without saying that Nagy's program was neither anti-Communist nor (yet) anti-Soviet.

Nagy and my colleagues, though lacking a precise or even a clear vision of the future, were crystal clear about their opposition to Stalinism and their hatred of Rákosi and his Stalinist gang. In private, they framed the issue in personal terms. On one side was the *öreg,* the old man, or *Imre bácsi,* Uncle Imre, as Nagy was affectionately called; on the other was the *kopasz,* the bald one, Rákosi—the bald murderer. With only a few exceptions, everyone at *Magyar Nemzet* rooted for the *öreg* and despised the *kopasz.*

In that majority was my political mentor, István Radó, the night editor. My senior by almost fifteen years, he took an interest in me, and we became friends. A victim of Rákosi's brutal purges, he almost never talked about the horrors he had experienced for four years as a political prisoner. (In that respect, he was much like others who were released in 1954–55, during Nagy's premiership.)

I knew he had joined both the small anti-Nazi resistance and the tiny illegal Communist Party during the Second World War, and I knew his wife had left him for another man while he was in jail. By the time we met, he was a quiet, gentle

soul, something of a loner. The shattered dreams of his youth kept haunting him, but he was no longer a Communist revolutionary. In his outlook and in his demeanour, he turned into a sad, soft-spoken man. Only when it came to Rákosi and his cohorts, and to the ÁVH (*Államvédelmi Hatóság,* or State Security Authority), the dreaded secret police, did Radó reveal the suppressed passions that struggled against his calm personality. I remember thinking that I was spared his worst experiences in the 1940s, because I was much too young then to be swept up in the political whirlwinds that engulfed Hungary and, indeed, all of Europe at that time.

By the spring of 1955, I was no longer too young to get by without a bad political experience. In April, as a result of Rákosi's machinations and Moscow's fear of Hungary slipping away, Prime Minister Nagy was ousted. In a month or so, I was in the first group of twelve staffers to be fired; a second group of nine others, including Boldizsár, the editor, soon followed. For its strong support of Nagy's anti-Stalinist "New Course", *Magyar Nemzet* was decimated.

My dismissal was undeserved. I had overheard a lot of political gossip, and I had a sense of what was going on, but I understood little of what I knew. Politics was not my beat. My interviews with composers and ballerinas were largely free of political content. So why was I fired? I put the notice of dismissal in my coat pocket and walked aimlessly from the publisher's office toward the Danube, crying. At twenty, my journalistic career seemed over. I did not have a college education, and I did not have a usable skill. I was going to lose my precious draft deferment. What would I do now? A few miserable weeks passed before I learned that my punishment was not as severe as I had feared. I was not classified as an enemy; I was not blacklisted. My punishment was limited. I was deemed an outcast forbidden to hold a full-time job. As a freelancer, I was permitted to write for trade publications and some other lesser known, low-circulation weeklies and monthlies.

After the initial shock wore off and I regained my bearings, I began to view my pink slip as a badge of honour. In a country that puts losers on a pedestal—Hungarians love to celebrate their failed heroes—I was acquiring the respected status of an innocent victim. Though I lost my free pass to the Opera House and no longer had an office with a desk and the prized telephone I used to share with four other reporters, and though I had to hustle to make a living as a freelancer, what mattered more and what made life even exciting was that I was no longer a political innocent. I belonged to a movement now, although I did not fully understand what it was about. I just *felt* the same way everyone I respected felt. Being in the movement meant that I picked up and passed on political gossip in the Hungária coffee house and at the Lukács swimming pool—the latter a unique spot that combined swimming with politicking—and that I regularly attended sessions of the Petőfi Circle, a newly formed meeting place for soul searching for the anti-Stalinist intelligentsia. In fact, I began to go there when the sessions attracted no more than a dozen people; by mid-1956, thousands showed up. Not once did I speak up, however. I was less interested

in the discussion, much of which I did not understand anyway, than in an attractive redhead who was a regular from the beginning.

More than a year passed this way—from the spring of 1955 to the summer of 1956—when Moscow, to please Tito's Yugoslavia, suddenly decided to dump Rákosi. The ups and downs, all dictated by Moscow, were confusing and nerve-racking: from late 1944 to 1953, Moscow favoured the Stalinist Rákosi. From 1953 to 1955, it preferred the anti-Stalinist Nagy. From 1955 to 1956, it once again supported the Stalinist Rákosi. But then, in the summer of that year, it dropped the Stalinist Rákosi again, without reinstating the anti-Stalinist Nagy... Still, I was encouraged, even delighted. Moscow had forced Rákosi, the bald murderer, to pack up and become an exile in the Soviet Union. At the same time, more and more Hungarians, mainly in Budapest, had begun to believe that something had to give, something good had to happen. The only specific expectation I can now recall was that the Communist Party would readmit Nagy to its ranks and, eventually, he would be returned to his position as the country's prime minister.

Good things began to happen to me, however. In August 1956, I wrote a radical article that the editors of the weekly *Művelt Nép* immediately accepted for publication and published on page 3 at the beginning of September. The article dealt with the teaching of foreign languages at high school and university levels. I was very proud of myself for being the first in the country to argue publicly that students should have a choice of taking Russian, English, German or French-rather than being required to take Russian. I received a few congratulatory notes. Long before Bob Dylan, the times they were a-changin'.

Also in August, Iván Boldizsár, the editor who always landed on his feet, was "rehabilitated" and authorized to start *Hétfői Hírlap,* a new weekly appearing on Mondays. (Boldizsár was the founding editor of *The New Hungarian Quarterly* in 1960.) The idea was to bring out a Sunday evening paper with an anti-Stalinist agenda—and with extensive summaries on its last page of the afternoon soccer games. On their way home from the stadiums, Boldizsár explained to me, the fans always stopped in their favourite tavern to argue about the teams and curse the referees. By the time they finished their second or third *fröccs* of wine and soda and ran out of arguments, they would want to read *Hétfői Hírlap* with news of the other games and of politics as well. I badly wanted to work for the new paper.

Within a few weeks, a special committee of the Journalists' Association "rehabilitated" me, too, stating after a two-minute hearing that my dismissal in 1955 was without cause. The hearing took place less than a month before the Revolution began. The chairman of the committee was Géza Losonczy, one of Nagy's two or three closest associates.

The Revolution that began on October 23 and ended at dawn on November 4 caught me by surprise and left me confused. The first day, I marched with thousands of university students through the streets of Budapest, going from Pest via the beautiful Margaret Bridge to Buda, shouting slogans about independence

from the Soviet Union and solidarity with Poland, where promising changes were under way. We demanded Nagy's return to the country's leadership. By evening, the joy I felt during the afternoon march gave way to apprehension. Witnessing the first shots at the Radio Station, I did not understand what was going on. I was baffled by the sudden appearance of young fighters. Who were these people? Where did their weapons come from? It took me another day or two to begin to sense something that was both curious and confusing: that the movement for the reform of the system was being pursued simultaneously with a revolution against it. I recall being both very excited and somewhat uneasy about what was happening around me.

Tamás Munk, MTI

Budapest, 23 October 1956. An immense, ecstatic crowd pours over the Chain Bridge during the afternoon.

I was puzzled by Nagy and remained so for about a week. On October 23, during the battle at the Radio Station, the Party co-opted him by making him a member of the Politburo and by returning him to the prime minister's office that he had occupied from 1953 to 1955. That was the good news. The bad news was that for almost a week he either vacillated or acted as if he were a hardline member of the Old Guard. His Marxism and party discipline blinded him to the ongoing revolution. He allowed Ernő Gerő, Rákosi's alter ego, to serve as the Party's first secretary and then approved Gerő's replacement by János Kádár, a centrist on the Communist political spectrum who would soon betray Nagy.

For five long days, the new government was composed almost entirely of discredited party hacks, at a time when Nagy, with the whole country behind him, could have consolidated his authority. With most non-Communist politicians of the 1945–47 coalition era in exile or forgotten—and no non-Communist counter-elite available to fill key positions—Nagy was the only credible politician on the scene. Yet, instead of taking advantage of new circumstances, he failed to surround himself with his own reformist supporters. For too many days, he did not respond to the demands of the street. Listening to Moscow's high-level emissaries, the Politburo members Anastas Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov, and his hardline Hungarian Communist colleagues, Nagy was insensitive to the mighty winds of radicalism outside party headquarters, where he spent day and night with his one-time comrades, recent critics and current enemies.

My disappointment in Nagy was matched by my ambivalence about the young insurgents I encountered on the streets of Budapest. I certainly shared their

demands for independence and freedom, and I was exuberant about witnessing the fall of Stalin's hideous statue. Yet, I was also troubled by and upset about individual acts of violence that I saw almost every day. Although these awful incidents usually occurred in response to provocations by remnants of ÁVH thugs, hanging these creatures on lamp posts was not my idea of change or justice. The other thing that bothered me was the apparent belief among the insurgents that everything was now possible. To my mind, it was one thing to shout "Russians, Go Home!"—as I did, too; it was something else to liberate Hungary by trying to defeat the Soviet Union. I felt that their demands were excessive, that they were going too far too fast. Put another way, I was put off by the freedom fighters' admirable but dangerous romanticism as much as I was put off by Nagy's inability to understand and then lead the Revolution that was under way.

Ferenc Bartal, MTI

Budapest, 2 November 1956. Minister of State Zoltán Tildy, Prime Minister Imre Nagy and Minister of Defence Pál Maléter preparing for a meeting with a Soviet delegation on the following day. Their goal was to have all Soviet forces withdrawn from the national territory by 31 December.

For these reasons, and embarrassingly, I did not do very much at all for several days. I wrote a brief article, listened to the radio, read the papers and talked with friends. I had a potentially dangerous encounter with a group of armed revolutionaries who occupied my weekly's printing shop. When news of the occupation reached our office, one of the editors asked me—because I was young, I suppose—to go downstairs to the printing shop and convince the insurgents to leave. My legs trembling, I told them *Hétfői Hírlap* was on their side. They took a look at the last issue I carried with me, we shook hands, and they left. No problem.

After a frustrating week of hope and despair, the Soviet government issued a conciliatory statement—published on October 31 but made available on October 30—that promised negotiations for the removal of Soviet forces from Hungarian territory. Nagy, encouraged by the Soviet declaration, announced the end of one-party rule. Since Mikoyan and Suslov, the two Soviet Politburo members, were in Budapest, I took it for granted that Nagy had made his dramatic announcement with the Russians' approval. Listening to him on the radio, he sounded confident. What I did not know then was that, having withdrawn most of its military from Budapest, Moscow was sending new troops to eastern Hungary from Soviet territory; in short, some were leaving, but others were coming. As Nagy more or less successfully kept the details of ominous Soviet troop movements out of the papers to avoid panic, I believed the Soviets were leaving. By November 1, I was

beginning to think the Revolution was victorious and Hungary would be free and independent. That was the day when Nagy embraced a major popular demand by declaring Hungary's neutrality and pledging the country's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. I did not know that Nagy's declaration—an act of desperation—was largely in response to the arrival of new Soviet troops in eastern Hungary. In less than twenty-four hours, between October 30 and 31, the Kremlin had completely changed its mind.

By accepting at face value what was being said in Budapest and in Moscow rather than paying attention to what was being done in eastern Hungary, I revealed my lack of political experience. So did everyone else I knew.

We lived in a dream world during the first three days of November. Budapest was calm. I was happy. I was proud to be Hungarian! Nagy had needed time to find himself, my friend Radó said, adding that compared with the French Revolution ours was quite nonviolent. It dawned on me that I had over-reacted both to Nagy's initial timidity and to the freedom fighters' excessive radicalism. I was witnessing a momentous historical event marked by instances—many instances—of sacrifice, courage and integrity. I began to phrase a report in my head about a store on Lenin Boulevard that was not looted, even though it was ripped open during the fighting. Seeing camaraderie around me lifted my spirits and spiked my ambivalence.

I felt that way, in particular, during the third great day of freedom—Saturday, November 3—when my editor told me to spend the day at the mighty Parliament Building. Little did I know that it would be the last day of free Hungary. A young reporter of barely twenty-two, I explored the sumptuous, labyrinth-like corridors and hallways of this outsized, glorious building on the Danube (built at the turn of the century), finding nothing unusual or newsworthy there. What I knew or thought I knew was that somewhere in the building Hungarian and Soviet negotiators were discussing the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Hungarian territory and they were making progress. I was told the talks would continue and possibly conclude in the evening. By Sunday, I believed, my country would regain its independence, achieving the twelve-day-old Revolution's major objective. By Monday, with the city's buses and trams scheduled to run again, I hoped I would not have to walk so much anymore. It did not cross my mind that the date and the place would so very soon—at dawn the next day—earn a page in history for deception and disgrace.

What caught my attention were two Western television crews getting ready for Prime Minister Nagy's midafternoon press conference. I had never even seen a television set, let alone a crew in action. Having been isolated from the West both physically and psychologically all my life, I was puzzled by the lights and the cameras, unable to figure out how something filmed here would be seen in living rooms far away. I jotted down a few words about this curious thing called television, wondering how to explain it to my readers the next day. I worried that I would not have anything else to report.

My editors at *Hétfői Hírlap* had sent Péter Halász and myself to the Parliament Building to cover the day's events. A senior correspondent, Halász was to do the serious political stuff, while I was assigned to write a *szines*—tidbits of mood and colour, political gossip, brief items about the atmosphere. Our deadline was Sunday noon; the paper was to hit the streets at dinnertime. As it happened, neither Halász, nor I could file our stories. No paper was published on Sunday. *Hétfői Hírlap* never appeared again.

Strange as it may now seem, I suspected nothing as I walked the corridors of the Parliament building on November 3, trying to catch a glimpse of Nagy—I did not succeed—and trying even harder to collect colourful tidbits of all the comings and goings for the report I expected to file the next day. Midafternoon, when I learned that Nagy's press conference was cancelled, I remained calm. He must be busy, I thought. His two deputies—Géza Losonczy, the man who chaired the Journalists' Association's special committee that had rehabilitated me in September, and Zoltán Tildy, the country's non-Communist president in 1946–48—showed up instead. Their plea to Moscow for good neighbourly relations was as pointed as my inability to comprehend their message to us, which was that the situation was desperate. Why did I not listen more carefully? I was present at the government's last, historic press conference, and I failed to decode either the words or the body language that strongly suggested the Russians were coming. My behaviour was strange, because all my life, living under authoritarian and totalitarian rule, I had to read between the lines—a skill one learns when the press is not free.

That Sunday—on November 4, 1956—Soviet troops, having reached Budapest, captured the Parliament. I could not have been more surprised. Caught up in the prevailing mood of euphoria, I did not believe—I did not want to believe—that the post-Stalin Soviet leadership would crush the Revolution. Denying the existence of bad news, I suffered from what social scientists call cognitive dissonance. Others might call it stupidity.

At 5.30 a.m. on Sunday, one of my cousins called to say I should turn on the radio. Right away. When I did, the voice on Radio Free Kossuth was familiar and the speech short: "This is Imre Nagy speaking, the president of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today at daybreak, Soviet troops attacked our capital with the obvious intention of overthrowing the legitimate Hungarian government. Our troops are in combat! The government is at its place. I notify the people of our country and the entire world of this fact." Speaking from a studio in the Parliament Building, Nagy read his four-sentence declaration for the first time at 5.20 a.m. It was repeated several times, and I listened to it several times, but I could not figure out what he was actually telling us. Are we at war? Is this the end? I was confused, stunned and despondent. In the next hour or so, the station also broadcast various appeals for Western help, and then it went dead. Meanwhile, Nagy and his immediate family, together with more than a dozen officials and their families, accepted

the Yugoslav Embassy's offer of asylum. As I learned many years later, that offer, made in collusion with the top Soviet leadership, was intended to trap and neutralise Nagy's government.

Two weeks after Moscow crushed the Revolution, I left Hungary, going first to Austria and a few weeks later to the United States. I became one of some 182,000 refugees from Soviet-dominated Hungary.

My parents, though I was their only child, did not discourage me from leaving. They stayed up all night before I left, watching me as I wrote a few notes of farewell to relatives and friends and put a few belongings together for my escape from uncertainty to uncertainty. Emerging from the kitchen, my mother came around to stuff her freshly baked sweets—the best in the world—into my small backpack. "Look up Uncle Sanyi in New York," she said. At dawn, when it was time to say goodbye, my father tried to hold back his tears but he could not. "Write often," he said, his voice quavering with emotion. We embraced. We kissed. As I left, they stood on the small balcony of our Barcsay Street apartment and waved. I walked backwards as long as I could see them, hoping they could also see me for another few seconds. (As I recall this scene some fifty years later, holding back my tears as my father once tried to do, I still see them waving on the balcony, and I always will.)

I did not fully appreciate until much later—when I had my own children in America—how unselfish my parents were to let go of me.

Now, five long decades later, having studied the scholarly literature and explored once-secret archives about 1956, I am surprised to find how little I knew or understood back then of what was happening around me. I thought there were many, many more insurgents than I now know to be the case. I assumed back then that the Soviet leadership was more united than it was. I have come to realize fully only recently the negative impact of the United States on the course of events both before and during the revolt. After the Soviet crackdown, I mistakenly expected the West to retaliate, really retaliate, against Moscow for the rape of Hungary.

I find it particularly telling now that Moscow and even Washington came to see the failure of the Hungarian revolt as something of a success. The Soviet Union claimed to have saved Hungary and the cause of socialism from Western machinations—even though Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist momentum, with its promise to reform the bankrupt Communist movement, was arrested after the Soviet intervention. It was hardly a mark of Soviet success that only Soviet force could sustain Communist rule in Hungary, and by implication, elsewhere throughout Central and Eastern Europe. As for the United States, it claimed the free world's moral victory over Communism despite that fact that its inability to assist Hungary—by advancing at least one diplomatic proposal, for example—

6 ■ C. L. Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 336.

spoke louder than its anti-Communist propaganda. True, the United States soon and abruptly abandoned the hollow slogans of liberation and rollback, but Washington never came clean by publicly acknowledging the damage it had done. "Poor fellows, poor fellows," said President Eisenhower privately of the Hungarians as he campaigned for re-election. He added, pathetically: "I think about them all the time. I wish there were some way of helping them."[6]

As for the Hungarians, members of the so-called "democratic opposition"—few in number, but persistent and quite realistic in their assessments of 1956—preserved the revolt's memory in their *samizdat* publications in the 1970s and 1980s, but a seemingly large majority of the population suffered from collective amnesia during the era of somewhat more moderate "goulash communism" after 1962 or so. Meanwhile, Hungarian exiles in the West kept the issue of Soviet domination on the agenda of Western chancelleries. The connecting tissue between Hungarian bravery in 1956 and the 1989 collapse of the Communist regime was the ceremonious reburial of Nagy and his associates in historic Heroes' Square in Budapest, in June 1989. With communism on its last legs, many Hungarians recalled that their sacrifices had not been in vain.

Yet, in 2006, fifty years later, most Hungarians have yet to come to terms with the complexities of what they did or did not do and what actually happened in 1956. Words like *defeat* or *failure* or *loss* seldom appear in public discourse because in the popular imagination the Revolution was victorious—until it was betrayed by an uncaring world. This conclusion reflects one of the recurring myths of Hungarian political culture: that those who bravely fight for hopeless causes and lose deserve more admiration than those who opportunistically seek, and obtain, small gains.[7]

With the rise of angry divisions in Hungarian society since 1989, moreover, current political considerations have come to distort popular explanations of who did what in 1956 and why the revolt failed. Reading history backward has become an integral part of a deeply polarised political scene. Today's ex-Communist socialists identify with Nagy and claim to be his heirs—and of 1956—as if their predecessors had had nothing to do with suppressing the revolt, supporting the Soviet intervention and, in 1958, organizing the juridical murder of Nagy and hundreds of revolutionaries. By contrast, today's anti-Communists—some of them political impostors and turncoats who, before 1989, cooperated with the Communist regime—minimize Nagy's Communist past, disparage his associates and passionately deny the Revolution's socialist goals.

7 ■ For three highly stimulating essays related to this point, see György Litván, "Mitoszok és legendák 1956-ról" [Myths and Legends about 1956], in *Évkönyv 2000* [Yearbook 2000] (Budapest, 1956 Institute, 2001), 205–18; Csaba Békés, "Győzhetett volna-e a magyar forradalom 1956-ban?" [Could the Hungarian Revolution Have Been Victorious in 1956?], in *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemből,* ed. Ignác Romcsis [Myths, Legends, Delusions in 20th Century Hungarian History] (Budapest, Osiris, 2002), 339–60; and Péter Kende,"Elkerülhetetlen volt-e a magyar forradalom, és mi volt a haszna?" [Was the Hungarian Revolution Unavoidable, and What Was Gained by it?], *Világosság* 37, no. 10 (October 1996): 3–22.

Alas, the behaviour of Hungarians—and Americans—in 1956 does not lend itself to simple explanations. Consider the answers to these questions: Was Nagy at one point a Stalinist true believer and a Soviet secret police informer? Yes. Was he a genuinely popular—if also a Communist—prime minister between 1953 and 1955? Yes. Were many of his supporters disillusioned Communists who had once loyally served Stalinist causes? Yes. Did they prepare the ground for an anti-Soviet revolution? Yes. Was Nagy both a patriot and a Communist during the revolt and in captivity afterward? Yes. Did he and his associates lead that revolution ineffectively, even incompetently—but to the best of their ability? Yes. As for the United States, did aggressive Soviet behaviour after the Second World War call for vigorous U.S. countermeasures? Yes. Did the U.S. government hope to liberate the Soviet satellites in Central and Eastern Europe? Yes. Did Washington prepare for the moment when some sort of diplomatic or economic, let alone military, assistance would be requested? No. Did key officials in the White House and elsewhere believe the slogans they uttered, or were they hypocrites? A few were true believers, most hypocrites. Did U.S. propaganda mislead the Hungarians? Yes. Did the United States let them down? Yes.

Even the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia displayed uncommonly complex characteristics in the 1950s, when, at times, bad guys did amazingly good things, too. Khrushchev brutally suppressed the Hungarians, while Yugoslavia's Tito, that shrewd hypocrite par excellence, conspired with the Kremlin, notably with Khrushchev, to ensnare and capture Nagy. Of these two scoundrels, Tito also pursued an independent Communist course that helped destroy the unity of what used to be international communism, while Khrushchev pursued an anti-Stalinist course at home that made life in the Communist world, especially in the Soviet Union, more bearable for millions of people.

Trying to cope with such a political muddle, I find the key players—notably some Hungarians and Americans—to have been both idealistic and self-serving, naive and cynical, brave and cowardly, agreeable and obstinate, principled and opportunistic. It is in this incongruous mixture of human and political qualities that readers of this book should expect to find new insights about the uplifting spirit and tragic outcome of the 1956 Hungarian revolt. To understand what happened and, especially, why the revolt failed, the celebration of valour should be accompanied by a recognition of ambiguities and inconsistencies. Contrary to Count Klebelsberg's advice cited at the beginning of this chapter, responsible scholarship should try to deprive people—Hungarians, Americans or Russians—of their historic illusions.

I have come to believe that, in 1956, a stronger dose of realism could have made a difference. For the tragic failure of the revolt—a product of excessive romanticism in Budapest, unwarranted belief in the power of rhetoric in Washington, and especially the confusing signals from Moscow that eventually yielded to the imperial impulse—could have been circumvented by more gifted and less idealistic leaders in Moscow, Washington and Budapest who knew both what was desirable and what was possible. ❧

Júlia Szalai

How Many Histories Do We Have?

Ágnes Losonczi: *Sorsba fordult történelem* (History as Turned into Personal Fate). Budapest, Holnap Kiadó, 2005, 329 pp.

The first question on a recent "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" went: "When did the regime change in Hungary take place?" The usual easy warm-up question, or so the show's host thought. The four options were 1968, 1990, 1998 and 2002. The contestant, well-dressed and well-spoken, an engineer in his forties, broke into a sweat and began to stammer, "Well, I'm not sure I know... Must have been quite recently... wasn't it?... Maybe when the last government was elected?" The host was quite visibly taken aback but supplied a broad hint. "Come on then, you must have been a grown man at the end of the 1980s, after all... You don't mean to say nothing changed in your life after 1990?" "That's the God's truth," the man replied. "We don't pay too much attention to politics where I come from. It's all the same to us, more or less, no matter what goes on. We just do our job, and try to get by. We did not experience any big *change* back then, and we don't now."

A quick handshake, the next contestant came on, the show continued. Still, the tension of this odd little exchange lingered, with its revelation of astonishing difference between lives and experiences lived through at the same time. If the regime change was not something shared by all of us, then whose change was it? If the collapse of socialism meant genuine freedom to one person, the everlasting firmly entrenched rule of the rich and powerful to another, and nothing but new fears to still another, then can we ever hope to have a common sense of history? Is there a way toward a shared future without first engaging together in learning about our past? Or will the vision of democracy informed by a culturally founded national awareness remain just a dream?

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Social scientists pointed out back in the 1980s that removing the taboos of socialism would not be enough. Too many wrongdoings, mutual accusations and self-justifications had accumulated during the 20th century to permit a swift early nationwide reconciliation, the kind of compromise which might lead to a shared vision of history. We also knew that if this common task were left undone, the freshly launched new institutions modelled on well-established Western examples would run aground on the rocks of Balkanisation. We also knew that there was no such thing as a "Balkanised democracy", a contradiction in terms. No matter how efficiently the new capital might be put to work, its effects would be wasted if corruption went unhindered, if large numbers of people continued to feel helpless and humiliated, and if there was no solid and reliable moral order in our daily life.

The years that have gone by have turned this premonition into bitter experience. It is an unfortunate fact, but a fact nonetheless, that the hard-won right to free speech has not only led to fruitful exchanges or the creation of public platforms for discussion. All too often, it has served more as the legal basis for slinging abuse, for the contest between individual and collective grievances and biased interpretations of history—a dialogue of the deaf. The post-socialist experience is that of disillusion with bitter political rivalries and unending hostilities. The public is a bystander, watching it all with indifference and in frustration. Increasingly disheartening public opinion polls testify that the country's free citizens do not really believe in, much less want to share, the future their elected leaders hold out to them. Politics are, at best, tolerated as a given but undesirable reality. People are no more inclined to think it is their business now than they did in the past. Most of their energy is spent on protecting themselves and protecting what is theirs. If nothing wrong happens to dramatically affect their personal lives, then everything is all right, just like in the old days—in the eyes of the majority, at least. The "old days" in question are the softer years under socialism, when there was no longer any open or harsh oppression. That is why "the change of regime" is not a cherished memory, a date etched in minds.

Ágnes Losonczi's greatest fascination is with the sociology of an everyday reality experienced as fundamentally static. She wants to reveal the origins of the widespread disillusionment with a political tradition that many Hungarians dismissed as "a playground of the elite". The central questions of her new book—never asked openly—could be put as follows:

When looked at from some distance—especially from the vantage point of several hundred years of Hungarian history—1990 seems to have created a genuine opportunity for Hungary to rejoin the mainstream of what may be called "Western civilization" and a real chance for the country's integration into Europe. How is it that the same change made little difference in the eyes of the majority, or if it did, why is it seen as bringing a torrent of new problems? How can there be such an enormous gap between a country's history and the perception of the same

history by its inhabitants? What attitudes, moral values and forms of action will originate from such a divide in national consciousness?

Although these questions were only put in the new post-1990 years, there is nothing new about the author's concern with the discrepancies between *public* and *private* interpretations of the world—or with the motivations, self-justifications and individual emotional material that accumulates in distinctive personal lifestyles. Losonczi had been noted much earlier for her interest in the lingering presence of personal histories in articles of everyday use, in the eating habits and dress of various social groups, or their different ways of expression. She took particular pleasure in the discovery of the "narratives of objects". Her intention was to unearth the surviving cultural palette which continued to evolve and change beneath the all-pervading grey surface of "socialism". This she did in her 1977 book, *Az életmód az időben, a tárgyakban és az értékekben* (Lifestyle in Time, Objects and Values), one of the fundamental works of Hungarian sociology. Her accounts of innovative spatial arrangements to serve the varied functions of overburdened households, of superb Sunday family lunches to symbolise cohesion and temporary victory over poverty, or of bathrooms built by groups of friends according to the strict rules of work-exchange in informal communities, gave news of values that had been preserved in defiance of the *system,* and were duly noted by her readers. These were often heroic accomplishments, minor triumphs achieved under heavy pressure. Her subsequent books testified profound empathy with, and understanding of, the sacrifices made for the myriad of such minor but meaningful daily achievements. In her two works published in the 1980s, *A kiszolgáltatottság anatómiája az egészségügyben* (The Anatomy of Helplessness in the Health System, 1986) and *Ártó-védő társadalom — Ahogy a társadalom betegít és gyógyít* (A Harming and Protecting Society—How Society Makes You Sick and Heals You, 1989), Losonczi looks at this complex of struggle, desire and ambition from a different perspective. Here the focal question posed is "We have survived a great deal, gone through even more, and our achievements are real. But what did it all cost us?" The answer in the form of facts, figures and excerpts from interviews exposed the massive deterioration in physical and mental health as a consequence of the daily drudgery and unacknowledged struggles that lay unseen behind the modest prosperity of the Kádár era.

This prosperity, incidentally, was at the time a subject of envy on one side of the Iron Curtain and of patronising praise on the other. From Losonczi we learned the other side of the story. Her works revealed that nerves had been shattered by the way that people had found themselves tossed from one extreme to another as a "necessary" sacrifice for national goals; that in the meantime, human relationships were falling apart at the seams; that the frustration felt by many in the face of great injustices was provoking aggression and anger and resulted in minor injustices in the private sphere. All this led in turn to increased vulnerability, laying the ground for ill-health and mental problems, consuming the strength and endurance of entire generations. For many people, and at many points in Hungary's recent past, childhood was a gloomy experience, and it was impossible to enjoy a healthy physical

and mental development during adolescence. As time went on, enormous burdens had to be shouldered as people matured into middle age (or rather, suffered the wear and tear of aging); those who lived to see old age at all were condemned to live it away from normal daily life, trying to survive on a bare pittance called a "pension".

Nobody, and certainly not Ágnes Losonczi, thought that with the collapse of socialism everything would change overnight. Still, many of us hoped, and we had good reasons to hope, that the healing process would at least begin. Social spaces, hitherto closed, were opening up, and family life would no longer have to be the scene where all the struggle, emotion and helpless anger played out. People's rights were safe at last. Whatever they had had to keep secret before could now be openly declared—be it their faith, ancestry or hidden property. Decades-long injustices and humiliations could be discussed openly, and even if reparation in the material sense was impossible, moral compensation could open the way to an inner peace and release energies for turning long-forgotten dreams and ambitions into reality.

Through the eyes of seventy interviewees, *Sorsba fordult történelem* investigates whether, after 45 years spent in an anti-democratic social system, there is still sufficient readiness and sense of adaptation in people to enable them to achieve a personal "regime change" in their private lives.

When examining the traumas the middle classes experienced in post-war Hungary, sociologists inevitably find themselves in a position where they can only build up a dissociated image of the "Hungarian bourgeois" by fitting together fragments of a jigsaw. Where there is property and ownership, they are not necessarily combined with a sense of vocation; where the spirit of craftsmanship has survived, there may be a lack of civic courage; and a bold entrepreneurial spirit, where it exists at all, is often coupled with an indifference to public affairs. In place of the citizen as the bearer of the unity of tradition, one finds businessmen, bureaucrats, teachers, doctors, journalists, educated mothers and local activists—all preserving or reviving one or another piece of that tradition, adapting it to current conditions. In other words, instead of the easily-describable category of Max Weber's *Bürger,* we find various groups of a middle-class whose values and lifestyles bear some of the marks of that category, but without any tangible network of cultural community (however tattered) that might bind them to one another.[1]

1 ■ It is the concept of "embourgeoisement" which is widely used by social historians and sociologists to point to those shortcomings of bourgeois development that have hindered, well into our times, the rise of an economically and politically potent civil society in Central Europe. The origins of the region's departure from the mainstream Western model trace back to late-medieval times. One can only list here the manifold historical factors: the deforming impact of Byzantine rule; the late eradication of serfdom; states too weak to protect the rising bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the well-organised endeavours of the landed aristocracy to conserve feudal economic, social and political structures; recurrent forced attempts at modernisation that gave rise to inorganic institutional developments; and—last but not least—the two waves of totalitarian rule in the 20th century openly attacking all former civil achievements. (For a detailed discussion, see: Jenő Szűcs: "Three Historical Regions of Europe". In: John Keane (ed.): *Civil Soviety and the State.* London: Verso, 1988, pp. 291–333.)

For her field research, Ágnes Losonczi chose a traditionally middle-class district in Budapest—a district that was relatively well protected against the forced and spontaneous population exchanges, the deportations and imposed resettlements with the similarly imposed allocations of new tenants in the period of what was then called "socialist modernization". For her method, she chose random, or almost random, encounters. Her team knocked on the doors of well-selected homes in well-selected houses, asking the residents if they were willing to tell the story of their families in the 20th century.

Of course, the risks this method involves are at least as many as the advantages. True, most interviewees rewarded their interlocutors with long, colourful narratives full of vivid personal detail. On the other hand, the raw material thus accumulated was very much defined by the position of the person narrating their family history. Their age and role within the family, together with their current social standing, turned out to be crucial in how they saw the family's middle class status defined as the frame of reference for the investigation—whether they regarded it as a matter of the past, the actual present or something they aspired to. It was foreseeable that the majority of the narrators would be elderly retirees, living more enclosed lives. Ultimately, 11 interviewees out of a total of 55 were over sixty, while only 3 were under thirty.

Thus, demographics largely determined the specific leitmotifs of 20th century history "as seen from below" that emerged with what the 1930s and 1940s generations, supplying the bulk of interviews, considered most important to tell. For them, quite regardless of the one-time social position of their forbears or the present-day position of the family, the formative period was the Second World War and the years following it—the years of their childhood. It was as if everything had been decided back then, compared to which anything their own efforts achieved was of a secondary importance. Those hard-won successes, the result of many decades of work, were accomplished under socialism. However, the prevailing general confusion in evaluating the near-past made it hard for them to speak about it in a meaningful way. Hence, the interviewees made all attempts not to waste too many words on those years and dwelt instead on what had been considered taboo then. The outcome is that these narratives still bear the marks of the attitude of a child, and are related as if from the child's point of view—which, of course, means viewing their own historical responsibility in the same evasive manner. It is as if all that they did—or failed to do—during the next sixty or so years had been a consequence of their abnormal start in life—as if growing up had not happened.

In *normal* times and in a *normal* world, it is up to the new generation to preserve and—by learning, effort, ingenuity and endurance, in other words, by employing the traditional middle-class virtues—to augment what their forbears have handed on to them. However, the childhood and youth of these middle-class generations were anything but normal. If they were unlucky enough to have been born into a Jewish middle-class family before or during the Second World War,

their early memories would above all be concerned with fear, concealment and struggle for survival; with mourning deported and murdered relatives, playmates and family friends; then being forced to denounce their social origins, being stripped of their property and being stigmatised as "class aliens". Nor did those born into a gentile upper middle-class milieu escape the experience of terror and the mourning of relatives who were killed in action or who vanished during their stint of *malenky robot* in Siberia or in Russian POW camps. As schoolchildren, they experienced harassment by the police because of their "guilty" descent. Some of them also suffered the fear of being deported, because their grandparents were identified as the "class enemy". Many saw their parents being reduced to nervous wrecks, their careers shattered. If they were children of old-time artisans or shopkeepers, they would be victimised throughout their early school years by suspicion and derision because of their "retrograde petty bourgeois" origins. If they happened to be children of "misdirected working-class" families, they would be subject to forced re-education campaigns by the Communist Youth Association. If they were descendants of poor farm workers swept into the big city by the tide of industrialisation and the hope for a better life, then, in addition to the extreme poverty in which they lived as young children, they were put into day-care centres, painfully missing the personal attentiveness of parental homes—while their mothers and fathers were ordered by the Party to work three shifts or attend crash courses at night. The number of variations on the same theme is endless. They include the early experiences of children of imprisoned Social Democrat printers, steel workers on forced labour as punishment for sabotage, farmers persecuted and robbed of everything as *kulaks,* politically unreliable lawyers, doctors and white-collar workers sent to do menial work in factories, and so on. All of them were children born in the wrong place at the wrong time.

For the majority, adulthood was when corrections could be made. Some tried to patch up the fabric of family relations; others were tormented all their lives by injured self-esteem, which they vainly tried to restore; still others made huge efforts to replace the valued objects they had lost or, very cautiously, to repair the social status they had been dislodged from. These were objectives taking decades to achieve, but instead of proudly upholding traditions and confidently passing them on, the interviewees resorted to code and camouflage to refer to them.

In these family chronicles people are on their guard all the time. There is a kind of continuous vigilance, a readiness to evade, or at least mitigate, incalculable threats coming from unexpected quarters. This seems to have pervaded human relations and had a greater impact on people's choice of mate, on child rearing, friendships and life styles than social position or wealth. It reproduced the atmosphere of overall distrust vis à vis "everybody else", day after day. Passing this on to the next generation has been almost unavoidable. Thus, a defensive general attitude coupled with ever-present suspicion has become the one shared characteristic of very different people on very different rungs of the social ladder and at widely different stages of their lives.

This basic attitude became so deeply internalized that its transferal from one generation to the next has strongly influenced the entire structure of Hungarian society over some sixty years. Being always on the alert, always ready for the ununexpected and the helplessness this may involve, was a stronger motivation in life than what genuine opportunities and achievable status offered. Careful consideration of every factor was required in finding the right schools or trades. As desirable as affluence or spiritual autonomy may be, they were seen by these families as too risky to be taken as a life goal. One interviewee summed this up:

> Our parents... made us all—every single child—learn a trade... The point was that we should all have a trade that would enable us to make a living anywhere, in any circumstances. We went on to study at a university or some other school of higher education after that. Professionals or intellectuals are not self-sufficient. They can be fired at any time if the bosses don't like the shape of their nose, their religion or ideology. Artisans, on the other hand, are needed always, everywhere. (p. 202.)

Yet, we learn from the interview that a defensive attitude in itself was not enough and submerging into it could easily lead to self-abandonment and further decline. Therefore, in families that had seen better days, this attitude was often combined with the moral imperative of struggle.

> The lesson I learned from my mother's life is that you must never give up. Whatever the situation you find yourself in, you must never say "I surrender". (p. 170.)

There is no universal recipe for the right measure of risk-taking or acceptable level of experimentation. In any case, these middle-aged, middle-class citizens do not draw the boundary lines where the older or the younger members of their class do. With a few rare exceptions, they see themselves as people who have lost out on the change of regime. It is from this aspect that they view and experience all that is happening to them now—or is likely to happen during the rest of their lives. They are no longer young enough and flexible enough to make a brand-new start or to take advantage of new opportunities. Nor are they old enough and retired enough to be able to ignore this new and different world posing grave threats to their jobs and hard-won positions, a world jeopardising the safety of the life they have managed to achieve.

It may seem somewhat surprising that those in their seventies at the time these conversations were recorded—around 1993–1994—viewed the collapse of socialism as genuine liberation. They felt they were already safe, out of harm's way, as far as their living conditions were concerned. With this momentous change, they were now free to talk about all they were forced to hide—not only from the wide world, but even from their children and grandchildren. They could at long last reveal carefully secreted or deliberately obscured bits and pieces of their family histories, such as a patent of nobility, the actual German origin of a family name that had been Magyarised on demand in 1946, the integrity and honour of an officer father in the Horthy era who was forced to do menial labour in the 1950s, or the strict observance in the Orthodox Jewish household of their own grandparents. Stories

can now be told about the horrors of deportation, including some telling episodes of disloyalty and betrayal by former "good neighbours". Now, stories of requisitioning, internment, or personal memories of hope and fear during and after the Revolution of 1956 can be freely told. In the end, as a kind of moral victory (at times tinged with a sense of self-justification), some examples of human integrity retained under the hated regimes could be cited, examples carefully kept hidden for a long time—sometimes betrayed a bit, but always admired in secret.

Openness, optimism and enterprise are characteristics of the young; however, their yearning for a different life is often motivated also by a strong commitment to make reparation to their grandparents and parents for their shattered lives:

> Their life has been one of constant struggle up to this day, and I have great respect for them. It is terrible that they had to wait so long to have a home of their own. I don't think I would be able to wait that long... Of all the children in the family, I think my life has been most successful. I never got stuck in one place but always moved on, financially as well a socially. At my age [21 at the time of the interview — J. Sz.] I already make as much money as my father does... In the old times, if you said something wrong or had relatives abroad, you could be arrested by the police and sent to prison. The way the system works today is far better, too, because if something doesn't work out right, it will be abandoned or done differently; the rules are no longer as rigid and inflexible as they used to be when there were five-year plans to meet and never mind if those plans were good or not. (p. 233)

Despite considerable differences in emphasis between the generations, one fundamental motif emerges from the book quite clearly: the desire to come to terms with the past. Whether the narrators are members of the generation concerned, their children or grandchildren, all the family chronicles told seem to gravitate toward the same historical period. Childhood traumas of the post-war years have already been mentioned as defining the middle generation, but also the narratives of both the older and younger point toward the same historical period. They show that the steepest turns in the family stories, those leaving the deepest marks, took place during the fifteen years stretching from the end of the war (what is commonly called the "fifties") to the reprisals following the 1956 Revolution.

Driven by the emphasis of the interviewees, the book devotes most detail and space to describing the period when the foundations of the Communist regime were laid and people of widely different social backgrounds were forced together into one mass by what the author calls the "great compression of socialism". Through analysing the narratives, Losonczi provides a deep insight into the post-1990 chance of rebuilding a middle class way of life by examing what has remained of its old culture. Her discussion attempts to gauge how profoundly the Communist dictatorship succeeded in altering the lives of families even beyond its own demise, and to assess how irreversible was the damage wrought by a strategy that methodically aimed to destroy traditions.

Even after more than fifty years, a knot still forms in the stomach on reading the unending list of indignities and injustices, of confiscations of property and rights, of victimizations and excommunications, all done in the name of creating a new order. Those who endured them—Jewish merchants dismissed after first heading their own nationalised businesses and relocated to operate machines in factories, former military officers collectively announced guilty, government officials declared to be untrustworthy, grammar school teachers declared to be enemies of the people, farmers with more substantial holdings called exploiters of the peasants, tradesmen accused of nostalgia for the old regime, and many more—were probably far greater in number than the winners. Even the winners, rural and working-class youths, paid dearly for their status, through a lasting sense of rootlessness and extreme vulnerability to political pressure.

The accounts teem with characters remembered as the villains of the era; even the act of recalling them induces anger. These were mostly local representatives of the hated central authorities: ÁVO officers (the hated political police), party secretaries, village council presidents, policemen, produce delivery commissioners and wicked factory foremen. As far as politicians are concerned, there were only two in the Fifties whose names are still well-remembered to this day: Mátyás Rákosi and Imre Nagy. Rákosi appears in the stories as the emblematic figure of "Communism", which is synonymous in these narratives with Stalinism, personality cult and terror; while Imre Nagy's name is associated mainly with the 1953 policy of liberalization, which was ultimately to fail.

It is quite astonishing, though, that Imre Nagy is never mentioned as the prime minister and a martyr of the 1956 Revolution—not even once, not even in passing. Neither is the Revolution. It is entirely missing from these family chronicles. It is as if all the interviewees, regardless of their backgrounds, had secretly plotted to structure their stories in the same way. The first period of the narratives lasts until 1955, followed by a break, then the story line is picked up again somewhere in the mid-1960s. References to 1956 are conspicuously scarce, and the retributions that followed are seen as a straight continuation of the Stalinist period.

When the interviews refer to the events of 1956 at all, they do it from a distance, in curt sentences using impersonal subjects and the passive voice. Otherwise vivid and frequently emotional narratives shift tone and suddenly turn matter-of-fact:

> Because of my husband's involvement in 1956, there was a house search. He was put under police surveillance, lost his job and found no work. (p. 142)... Two of my five brothers and sisters died of cancer. I know for sure that stress had a great part in their deaths. Both had taken part in the Revolution, though not in any armed fight. They drifted from job to job and could never find proper work. (p. 150)... My father was swept away by the wind of 1956. Not by the wind of the Revolution, but by the winds of 4 November [the day the Russian tanks rolled in—Ed.'s note]. Before the final closing of the borders, he crept over to Austria on his belly. And with that, our family life was over, very early indeed. I was only 5 years old at the time. (p. 156)

Not once are the heady days of the Revolution or the sudden sense of freedom recalled with enthusiasm. If a narrator mentions 1956 at all, it is always in the context of escape and retaliation, of families torn apart. One recurrent motif is the extreme ruthlessness of revenge for the Revolution, with which farmers were again forced into agricultural cooperatives in the aftermath of 1956. The image associated with the new wave of fear and loss is impersonal; it is one of Soviet tanks looming up. When there is a face in the background of the tanks at all, it naturally belongs to János Kádár. Yet, it flickers up only for a few seconds before his image as the restorer of oppression is swept off the shelf of memory, and is quickly replaced by a different image of the man.

Kádár is seen—regardless of generations—in split vision: first as a puppet of the Russians, next as the architect of peace, consolidation and modest prosperity. The latter role is recalled with conspicuously greater and more sincere emotion than the former. Praise for the eponymous hero of the "Kádár Era", nostalgically recalled as the golden age in the tumultous 20th century, even creeps into interviews which otherwise reflect an unrelenting opposition to socialism.

The motives for this admiration appear to be truly personal. Context reveals that the praise is mainly for the sense of security and the chance to re-establish self-esteem that the Kádár Era brought. To the interviewees, these years brought back a sense of slow ascent and the inviolability of private life after the long, dark years of the fearful Fifties. It is as if a continuity could be created with the pre-war world of the middle classes, and at least psychologically, a sense of normalcy could be restored. These people believe even today that while social status, lifestyle and political tastes were not allowed to be re-established, in private life at least, the slow rehabilitation of old values, thought of as gone for ever, could begin. That is why even those who shed no tear at the collapse of the old system, who are fully committed to the post-1990 change, reserve some respect for this particular achievement. This is not mere nostalgia, as is often thought. It is rather the way in which people with too many bitter experiences view the past. They appreciate continuity much more than they do great, but risky leaps forward. They set a much higher value on peaceful transition than on correcting historical injustices, regardless of the clean slate held out as an inducement, clearly aware of the price that should be paid for it. These same people feel the most positive about the past fifteen years—a period full of contradictions, but free of great tragedies. Despite their complaints, they are still waiting patiently, with dogged determination. The interviews in this book show that there are many of them, with a whole range of political allegiances. What they really expect, as the narratives reveal, is not so much the creation of a radically new society, but an expansion of that world of the middle-classes that began in the later years of the Kádár Era—though back then as a strictly private matter. The new democracy carries for them, first and foremost, the opportunity for, or rather the promise of, restoring freedom and moral order. As one of them puts it:

> My experience regarding politics as well as religion has been that those engaged in them do one thing and preach another... Concerning politics, I used to be in full agreement with my husband, but now he still supports the old regime, while I see positive things in the new system, too. But capitalism is something I do not like. (p. 222)

Or a more sweeping judgment:

> Under the old regime there were plenty of restrictions and possibilities were limited. Everything happened very slowly; it dragged on forever. Today it is all different. Everyone has the opportunity to break out. It is your basic right as a human being that you should be able to do freely whatever you think fit. Schooling was guaranteed for everyone in the old regime, but what a horrible school system it was. Financially, of course, it was easier to study than it is today, but it was hard to remain human. (p. 279)

What emerges from the excerpts is a markedly rosy picture of the 1980s; in comparison, comments on the regime change reflect a cautious trust in the future, rather than a positive perception of the present. It must be emphasized, however, that this image emerging from the interviews is, in fact, a snapshot. More importantly, that snapshot was taken in 1993–1995, three of the most difficult years of the entire transition.[2] At that low point, inflation stood between 25 and 35 per cent annually. It was the time of the first massive waves of unemployment. Only in the second half of the decade did the economy start to grow again. All this could not be foreseen when the interviews were recorded. It is in this context that the interviewees' recurrent references to a secure existence, to jobs never threatened, low prices, free schooling and an acceptable level of pensions must be seen as the central elements of their nostalgia for the past. As to the present, even those most committed to change express a vague hope at best. Something like this:

> In socialism, you could get ahead financially more slowly, but with greater security. Today people can get rich very quickly or go completely broke in next to no time. But even so, the situation today is better anyway than it used to be. (p. 279)

Or, a little more enthusiastically and more explicitly:

> I am biased in favour of the change of regime. I regard almost everything as good. The bad things could have been expected in advance. Public security is poor, there is a great deal of poverty, but my conscience is clear. It is better to live in truth. (p. 272)

It is tempting to speculate on how the same people would respond if they were interviewed today. In fact, there are strong hints in the way they told their own tales, in the turns of speech and the specific emphases they used. There is also additional evidence provided by the data from four general elections and their analysis, as well as by sociological surveys conducted over the past ten or so years with groups from similar backgrounds (owners of small and medium-sized

2 ■ In the first half of the 1990s, the term "transformation crisis" was coined to denote the specificities of the multifaceted socio-economic tensions and damages induced by the post-socialist systemic change.

businesses, small-town elites and certain groups of civil servants and the employees of civil organizations). Given all this, we may safely guess that there would be more positive words about the advantages of the change today, but also that criticism would be sharper. Probably more of Ágnes Losonczi's subjects would report a perceptible improvement in the family's financial position and the successes of the family business rather than of its teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. They might speak proudly of a child or grandchild now studying in Austria or Belgium; they might mention being at long last able to afford a holiday in Spain, or at least the Dalmatian coast. However, they would probably complement this with strong words about the enormous riches accumulated by former party secretaries, about the privatization of public assets, about the proliferation of corruption and shady dealings, and—last but not least—about the squabbles between political parties which have brought politics into total disrepute for many. They would probably close with the oft-heard remark: "The same people are on top as before. What kind of a regime change is this? This is not what we expected. There is one good side to it, though. We are at least left alone."

Bitter words, but one cannot help noticing that not even the most disillusioned wish for a return of the old regime. The fearsome schizophrenia of the past now seems to have been replaced by a duller depression and shifts of mood (not entirely free of the symptoms of paranoia). The symptoms are different and may signal a change for the better, even herald the beginning of a slow healing process, a hope that a coherent civil society will emerge from the fragments of the old middle-class world.

Therefore, from the perspective of the years that have gone by since these interviews were recorded, we have to agree with Ágnes Losonczi's conclusion in her closing chapter. A vital condition for social healing, more urgent perhaps than many important economic and political problems, is to understand diverse and sometimes conflicting injustices, themselves the consequences of the past. This is a difficult and controversial task, indeed, and can only be accomplished if the whole of society undertakes it. Only when reconciliation is possible, will all those private histories be united into a shared historical narrative. The very last lines of the book call for a fundamentally new attitude:

> We do not have to agree with others, but we have to understand them; we do not have to march together, but we must at least have a few words for each other when meeting at the crossroads... Nothing but understanding can help each and every one of us to lead stable lives and get along with ourselves, our past, the past of our parents and with our fellows. In an increasingly pluralised world, with its many different facets and ways of thinking, this is the only chance that—even if the broken pieces cannot be rejoined—there will at least be communication between all the segments. ❧

Miklós Györffy

Sons Without Fathers

György Dragomán: *A fehér király* (The White King). Magvető, 2005, 301 pp.
Krisztián Grecsó: *Isten hozott* (Welcome). Magvető, 2005, 319 pp.

For years now, Hungarian literature and cinema have been obsessed with the theme of a father: specifically, the son's lack, the son's search and the son's questioning of his father. Fathers were killed in the war, deported to concentration and forced labour camps, imprisoned, déclassed and recruited as informers. Sons searched for them and tried to understand them. Two of the emblematic works here are Péter Nádas's *Egy családregény vége* (The End of a Family Saga) and Péter Esterházy's *Harmonia caelestis*. The sequel to the latter, *Javított kiadás* (Revised Edition), is perhaps where the father–son relationship reaches its dramatic peak.

The newest generation still has something to say on the subject. More like a series of connected short stories, *A fehér király* (The White King) is the second novel, autobiographical in inspiration, by György Dragomán, who was born in 1973 in Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş, Transylvania). The protagonist is a boy of eleven or twelve, whose father has been taken by the secret police for forced labour on the construction of a canal somewhere on the Danube delta. *The White King* is not, however, the story of the father, nor the figure of the father, nor of the horrors of the forced labour camp, and even less so of the Romania of the Ceauşescu era. It is about a boy who loses his father overnight and does not even know (just as his mother doesn't) if he is still alive. Now branded as the son of a deportee, all he can do is to carry on with his own small life in the everyday of a commonplace housing estate, thinking of his father compulsively day and night.

Dragomán does not turn to realistic psychology or representation to depict the milieu. Nor does he offer a systematic development of the characters—even less a depiction of the era. The book aims more at a grotesque deformation which ultimately turns into absurdity. The boy's sound mental state and his natural reflexes conflict with the absurd circumstances that have put him into the position he finds himself in. His weekdays consist of bizarre adventures that at times verge on the fantastic. The real touches upon the unreal, the tragic upon the comic. Absurd con-

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tradiction, grotesque deformation is, in the last analysis, the writer's picture of dictatorship in its East European, above all Romanian, version, in which fathers are deported to forced labour camps.

The method is vaguely familiar: another Transylvanian writer, Ádám Bodor, took a similar point of departure in the short stories of his *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District), set in an apocalyptically desolate Romania. There, all small details were authentic, but accumulated within a cycle of short stories, they make up a nightmare.

The eighteen chapters of *The White King* are as many variations on the theme of destructive deformation. Also reminiscent of Bodor's pattern is the construction of a loosely connected cycle of short stories, which may also be read as a novel. In all the stories, the protagonist is the fatherless boy (in Bodor's work, he is already grown-up), and each new story is told from his viewpoint, in the first person singular. The style of Dragomán's narration is another factor that creates unity: the sentences are very long, in places pages-long (as if in one long breath), but their structure is simple—they are a series of co-ordinate clauses.

Unlike the usual personal narrative, what is related here is not a reflection of how the mind or memory of the narrator work. The stories related are straightforward and direct, all dialogue is in the form of reported speech.

The material of the earlier stories, it becomes clear, is being built into those that follow. The narrator refers to themes and motifs that have appeared earlier as though no separate story had been devoted to them; however, knowledge of them brings the reader above the horizon of the particular story and creates a sense of a fictional narrative and of the passing of time. The shaping of a novel-like form is clearly detectable: while in the first story, the fact of the father's deportation is presented as the beginning of something, in the last story the father returns in handcuffs—for the last time before disappearing for good.

All the stories take place in the same unnamed town. Many neighbourhoods and venues in the town are precisely depicted and could be identified, yet the uninformed reader pictures it more or less as any town typical of Eastern Europe, of Romania, or even of Transylvania at times. There is a sense that it is important for the setting to be so generalised.

In addition to this generalised milieu, there is another striking feature: the protagonist's stories lack an examination of nationality, something which is rarely absent in contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian writing that bases itself on the social reality of Transylvanian life. Even the boy's own (Hungarian) nationality is ambiguous, nor is it certain that his father's ethnic status contributed to his deportation, (even though that was an important consideration behind deportations to the labour camps). The young boy's ethnic environment might best be characterised by the names that crop up in the stories, and these can be described as mixed—another similarity with Ádám Bodor's work.

The manner of representing deformation is thus somewhat stylised. However, the world Dragomán's hero lives in is an easily identifiable case of deformation, the inimitable absurdity and brutality of Romanian communism. The Romanian reality is emphatically present and can be recognised, but it is also re-interpreted as unreality, an almost painfully grotesque literary symbol for a painfully familiar experience.

The world of *The White King* is conditioned to react to everything with brutality, vulgarity, threat, humiliation, fraud and falsehood. In "The End of the World", the twelve-year-old boy gets into trouble with Uncle Gica, a sadistic goal-keeper coach. The coach's training method is straightforward—assault and battery with an iron bar, unless they deliver. In the changing-room, he kicks the boy's rival for the goal-keeper position, Janika, in the face so that "I heard something crack, and Janika fell against the coat-stand and then slid to the ground ... I saw that he was motionless and blood was seeping from his ear...." What had set the coach off was the arrival of soldiers with instruments onto the playing field, who warned the children off and the goalkeepers to avoid touching the ball—as it gathered radioactivity from the grass. "Last night there was an accident in an atomic reactor in the Great Soviet Union."

In another story, "Valve", a teacher appropriately nick-named Iron Fist, is willing to overlook the fact that the narrator stole the tyre-valve from the front wheel of his motor-cycle, provided he will take part, under another name, in the local finals of the "Defence of the Homeland" competition, and lose because "our school team is not expected to qualify any higher". (The boy is a good shot, who was left out of the team because of what had happened to his father.) In other words, he is expected to deliberately shoot a low score. Should he do well, Iron Fist would punish him for the theft of the valve. Out of defiance, the boy shoots well and scores 120, but when the results are announced, his score is given as 63. Fraud is so much taken for granted and is engaged in almost automatically so that, ultimately, Iron Fist does not learn the truth.

In these and in quite a few other stories, absurd reality itself becomes unrealistic. "Abundance" is about the sale of bananas in the supermarket on the housing-estate. First a long queue forms, and jostling increases to the point where a riot breaks out. After the ironworkers break in the windows and the mob loots the store, the police arrive and the rioters flee with their booty. The mass hysteria induced by the opportunity to buy bananas is plain history; from the contemporary perspective of the child and the retrospection of the narrator, it becomes East European unreality, deformation.

In "Movie", perhaps the best story, the basic situation is in itself grotesque: the schoolchildren attend a compulsory film screening in a cinema when, as so often happened in Romania, the electric current is switched off for a time. The situation assumes a surreal character (without ever really losing contact with reality): during this power break two boys make their way in the dark through a ventilating shaft to a secret viewing room maintained exclusively for "the comrades". Here they start watching the film that they find in the projector (running off a separate generator), which turns out to be pornographic.

In another type of story, reality turns into "genuine" (?) unreality. Interpreting the fantastic element in these pieces is not easy and it is difficult to decide whether this is a virtue or a shortcoming. In "Africa", the boy and his mother visit a former Romanian ambassador to an African country, in the hope that he will use his influence in the interest of the father. (The background of the visit is something that is broached in other stories too—that the grandfather had been an influential party official. Though fallen from grace on account of his son's arrest, he still has a few contacts, including

the former ambassador.) The retired diplomat lives in a huge flat (formerly four flats turned into one) which houses a huge collection of big game trophies and art from Africa. While the ambassador is flirting with the mother trying to persuade her to provide favours in return for his, the boy, sent to a distant room, is playing with an eerily ape-like old Negro, a chess automaton, and captures his white king. In the end he hears his mothers' calls for help from afar, and hurries to her assistance.

The eponymous hero of another story, Pickaxe, reappears in "Bargain". His face is disfigured by pockmarks. His hut is in the sewerage canal. When the hero, on his way home, is attacked by Lupu's gang, who want to beat him up and rob him, Pickaxe rescues him and invites him to his shelter. Here he keeps hundreds of songbirds in cages sunk into the ground, and gets them to sing a concert. Then he shows the boy his father in a shaving mirror as he is digging and pushing wheelbarrows at the Danube canal. This element, meant to be a poetic image, does not really fit into the immanent surreal character of other stories. [The story "Pickaxe" appears in this issue on pp. 54–62.]

Krisztián Grecsó is three years younger than Dragomán. His *Isten hozott* (Welcome) was published by the same publisher, Magvető. Despite their differences, there are surprising similarities between the two books. *Welcome* is also autobiographical in inspiration, a personal narrative, whose protagonist is a teenager. True, the story has a wider time-span: the span of the narration, most of the text, comprises some eighteen months from the years 1981–82, when the narrator is fourteen and fifteen, as well as three days in 1990, when he, now twenty-three, recalls the earlier period. Yet, as in Dragomán's work, the locales can be identified in this novel; a village in the south of the Great Plain and a small town nearby, given fictitious names, turn into a stylised, almost mythical space. Fatherlessness also plays an important part: the hero, as it turns out, spent his early childhood in an orphanage, and his best friends were also orphans or children with only one parent. And although its form is unambiguously that of a novel, *Welcome* also displays similarities with Dragomán's series of short stories insofar as the structure of the novel seems contrived: the inserted anecdotes are brilliant, not only in themselves but also because they are unified in spirit and style and make up a sizeable portion of the book. Grecsó made his debut as a writer with short stories written in the same vein. His first book, *Pletykaanyu* (Gossip Mum), was a series of short stories on the present life of the same village, which created something of a stir amongst those who identified themselves with the characters in the book. Now in his new novel he probes into the recent past of the same village.

Welcome does not present a traditional depiction of the age, although it relies to quite an extent on traditional patterns of fiction, above all on Kálmán Mikszáth's 19th-century anecdotal style. But it can also be read as an *Entwicklungsroman:* from this aspect, it is the story of how the narrator, Gergely Gallér, is gradually alienated from his childhood environment as a result of his deepening knowledge of it, and how, at a later date, when he lives elsewhere, he makes his peace with it through reminiscence, finding his way back to it. But most of the time what is conjured up before the reader is a closed, magical-mythical, world which is attractive and cosy, as well as frightening and unpleasant.

The fictional name of the village, on the river Tisza, is Sáraság. For its inhabitants, it is the centre of the universe, indeed the universe itself, because for them nothing outside the village really exists. In one passage, the narrator says in a rare explicit and generalised statement

> The child-minding teacher in the town had no idea how nasty the gossip is that is spread about her in the village. How could she have known that her one-time neighbours and loved ones would gladly stone her, that the playmates of her childhood in the village have turned into fat, toothless, dirty-nailed peasant women who know nothing of the world outside the village, who have hardly heard of János Kádár, the General Secretary of the Party, nor do they know that the capital of the small-time country with sweaty armpits is Budapest. There is no exaggeration in this at all, it's not that they cannot remember—they just don't know.

Time stands still in the village. According to the locals nothing new ever happens, for nothing new can happen—the world is as it is here. Whoever wants to find a story in it, find traces, search the truth beyond the beliefs, legends and secrets, is someone different—just as the hero is different, who for a long time had been a real local, in his own eyes and in those of the others, but then turned out to be different. Sáraság is, to some extent, the Hungarian Macondo.

As a sign of belonging in the village and of the separation from everything beyond it, Sáraság has a mythology of its own. The villagers live with miraculous stories that outsiders and strangers can neither see nor understand. The wandering Jew once banished from the village, charged with ritual murder, is called the Death Carrier, who comes back on a tumbrel drawn by a grey horse to carry away the souls of Sáraság. His one-time mistress, Aunt Pannika, of a baronial family, who was for a time secretary to the chairman of the agricultural co-operative, typed up a mysterious text by way of an official document, which scandalised the addressee, the superior party authority. The document, which none of the villagers have read, is named the Klein Diary by the village. Some surmise it may depict the sexual escapades of Aunt Pannika; others claim it is in reality a book of the dead which, based on Ede Klein's suggestions, contains the dates at which the villagers will pass away. When informed about Ede Klein's fate, Gergely Gallér starts researching his life and founds an Ede Klein Circle. One member, Dezső Metz, four years his senior, who regards himself as a *kaliber,* that is a medium, regularly contacts the ghost of the departed Uncle Pista Avarka, who guides him in his appraisal of events. Stray shadows show up in the village as apparitions from the afterlife. These are the ghosts of departed villagers. It happens that a person is followed not by his own shadow but by that of an ancestor. These shadows can only be seen by the villagers, not by anyone from the outside world. Locals are tormented by an insatiable thirst, so they always carry a *kanta,* a water-pot with handles and a lid, filled mostly with watered beer. They drink everything else, too, and so do their children. The compulsive repetition of the grotesque motif of carrying the *kanta* creates the notion of a mythical curse, the source of which is obviously the alcoholism that is destroying the villagers' lives. When the hero starts his secondary education in the neighbouring small town, his eternal thirst is somewhat appeased.

A mysterious figure in the village is a bull of a man, the lecherous Gyula Franczek,

a buyer at the co-operative. Although he 'tosses' all the women, his sperm is, according to the doctors, sterile. So, he may not have fathered his own children. Another test, however, shows that he is the father of his children beyond all doubt. Franczek is both a clever, aggressive man and a muddle-headed missionary—he preaches what he reads in the Bible. The shaft of a tractor lacerated a certain Pop Töre's sexual organ, and the surgeons reattach his scrotum to his thigh. Subsequently he not only fathers a son but his son has his scrotum in his thigh too.

Such miraculous motifs are supplemented by extraordinary 'cases', local events in which time thickens, as it were, so that no one can ever learn the complete truth about them. For this reason, they provide an opportunity for the villagers to experience their closedness. A brilliant anecdote, and a classic piece, is the Beregis' journey to a Budapest cemetery. They receive news of the death of the father, who had been living in Budapest for some time. They refuse to believe that the funeral is held in two weeks' time, because in Sáraság, the dead are buried within three days. Thinking that they are to be cheated out of their inheritance, they take the train to the capital and bring with them a huge plastic wreath. At the Rákoskeresztúr cemetery they are finally given to understand there is no funeral as yet. They want to hide the wreath in bushes in the area, in order to avoid carrying it back. Searching for a suitable hiding place, Granddad Beregi chances upon Lot 301, where the '56 revolutionaries, among them Prime Minister Imre Nagy, lie buried in unmarked graves—he is then grabbed and taken away by the secret police, who then interrogate him for three days.

Teacher Számfira's 'case' with the sulphur solution meant for cleaning barrels is also a perfect set-piece: he drinks it by mistake, and when his doctor friend tells him that he is going to die within hours, he returns home, makes love to his wife, and puts on his best clothes. Later, his daughter's face is ruined by a firework she mistakes for a cigarette, yet she manages to get married. Her wedding party is broken up by 'some people' with a shower of faeces from a waste removal vehicle—we never learn who the culprits were. Similarly, 'some people' raze Aunt Pannika's tobacco shop to the ground, in a *Kristallnacht* style, for as Ede Klein's mistress she too is thought to be Jewish. Whether an anti-Semitic atrocity of this kind could have gone unpunished in Hungary in 1981, I do not know, I have to take the author's word. If, however, it is a case of poetic exaggeration, such as in other miraculous attributes of Sáraság, then this exaggeration is somewhat problematic, insofar as other contemporary historical details in the depiction of the village and its environment are totally authentic and precise.

In the last analysis, the uncertainties in the *Entwicklungsoman* derive from a lack of a clear-cut blueprint for the multiple layers of motivations. It is clear that Gergely Gallér, a lonely librarian in a small town, is twenty-three when the Communist system collapses and he re-lives his childhood in Sáraság, which ended with the 'great row', the dissolution of the Ede Klein Circle, his being denounced and 'expelled'. However, it is not made clear, what 'brand' can be found on Gergely Gallér, and who he really is. In his reminiscences—which, in form and mode of speech, do not really appear as reminiscences—he gives a long account of all and everything, except his own family and home. At the end, however, it turns out

that he has neither a family nor a home, and was an inmate in a children's home in the locality. But the tone and content of the reminiscing narrative do not really lead us to suspect that the narrator is withholding an important piece of information—it is as though he has forgotten about it. In a chapter on his visit (or return?) home in 1990, we get the impression that he wants to sew up the loose ends. Gergely returns to Sáraság because a one-time friend phones him to say that the Klein Diary has been found in the safe of the agricultural co-operative, now scheduled for winding up. It is to be expected that light will be shed on many mysteries. But the diary pages turn out to be empty. Also, Gergely is given two contradictory solutions about the secret of his birth. One version is Aunt Pannika's, who—and this comes to light only at the end too—had looked after him at the time as a mother would have. But despite appearances, she is not his mother and Ede Klein is not his father, although Gergely is said to be very much like him. She had an abortion after Ede Klein's last one-day visit, in 1966, though as regards the date of conception this child could have been Gergely. As opposed to this, Glass-Eyed Tóth claims Gergely is indeed Ede Klein's son and that he had been placed into the orphanage because of the humiliations his mother had suffered and was later to suffer. The story of Ede Klein's visit to Sáraság in 1966 and of the amorous night he spent with Pannika is told earlier in Gergely Gallér's memoirs, and is said to have been revealed by Uncle Avarka's ghost to Dezső. Then, as the book closes, Gergely Gallér introduces himself as Gergely Klein.

This is altogether a bit contrived and tortuous. It is baffling why we only learn in the final pages, when his visit as a grown man is described, how Pannika used to invite Gergely to tea every Friday. "Why did I give you", she now asks, "the many books, perhaps too many, about the Talmud and the Torah, if they have only confused you." How was the narrator able to speak about her while keeping silent about these things? Perhaps because he did not want the reader to suspect Pannika is his mother? Because this may have harmed the crime character of his story? ❧

Ulf Zander

Wallenberg: Man and Myth

Attila Lajos, *Hjälten och offren. Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest* (The Hero and the Victims. Raoul Wallenberg and the Jews in Budapest). Växjö, Svenska Emigrantinstitutets skriftserie, 2004, 315 pp.

What was Raoul Wallenberg's fate after he was taken into Soviet custody in Budapest in January 1945? During the last decade, a Russian-Swedish committee tried to find new archive material that could shed new light on the case. The final report, however, was anything but satisfactory: among the questions that remained unanswered were why Wallenberg had been arrested, who had ordered the arrest, why he remained in Soviet custody after the war and why important KGB-documents had been destroyed.[1] In addition, an official Swedish-appointed commission published its report. (One of its aims was to find out what actually took place in Budapest in 1944–45, another was to look into what those running Swedish foreign policy did to get straight answers from the Soviet authorities as to why Wallenberg had been arrested and where he was within the vast Soviet camp- and prison-system.) The commission stated that it was beyond doubt that the Soviet government was solely responsible for Wallenberg's death. Besides that, the commission report concludes that the Swedish Foreign Ministry did too little too late to save the Swedish diplomat.[2]

It is, however, not only what happened to Wallenberg after January 1945 that interests historians and political scientists. In a recently published dissertation, the Swedish historian Attila Lajos strives to reassess Wallenberg's rescue efforts in Budapest in 1944–45. He sees them against a backdrop of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Hungary, a relation marked by schizophrenia. Amidst the anti-Semitic tendencies, Jewish businesses, as important economic entities, eased the assimilation of the Hungarian Jews. These then disappeared after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944 and the

1 ■ Ingrid Palmklint & Daniel Larsson (eds.): *Raoul Wallenberg. Report of the Swedish-Russian Working Group,* Stockholm: Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2001, chapter 14.

2 ■ Ingemar Eliasson et al: *Ett diplomatiskt misslyckande. Fallet Raoul Wallenberg och den svenska utrikesledningen,* SOU 2003:18, especially pp. 575–577.

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brutal rule of the Arrow Cross in the autumn and winter of that year.[3]

Lajos has studied Hungarian archive material which has not been thoroughly researched before. His conclusion is that members of the Hungarian government during the autumn of 1944 (until the Regent, Miklós Horthy was forced to resign) tried to assist the foreign-led efforts that were made to rescue the Jews of Budapest. An important motivation for both Swedish and Hungarian politicians was that they both expected an Allied victory and that the inevitable defeat of Nazi Germany would create a radically new situation.[4] Such initiatives were however doomed when the Germans took over. One of their first acts was to accelerate deportations to the death camps.

Besides Wallenberg, the Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz, the Italian businessman Giorgio Perlasca and other more or less well-known individuals, including Hungarian Jews themselves, took an active part in rescue operations of which Lajos mentions three in particular. One was run by the Jewish Council, another by the Zionistic organisation Vaadas and a third by Miklós Krausz, the Jewish Agency's representative in Budapest, who worked closely with the Swiss Legation. The Jewish Council tried to channel and carry out orders coming from the German authorities in the hope that the outcome should be less harsh than if the Germans themselves implemented them. Vadaas as well as the Swiss Legation negotiated with the Germans. This included the so-called Blood for Trucks negotiations, offering money or products in exchange for Jewish lives. Thus, Lajos questions the notion that the Jews in Budapest were largely passive victims waiting to be led to slaughter. This latter conclusion, however, may contradict the image of the active, heroic Wallenberg, an image which numerous books, articles and artistic representations began to shape soon after the end of the war.[5]

As the author sees it, Wallenberg did not act "against the structures that were in place". Instead, he "skilfully exploited the favourable power structures that did exist for his rescue actions". These included bribes, wining and dining certain individuals and other, less orthodox, methods. To act in such ways does not correspond with the definition of heroism that Lajos agrees with.[6]

There are a number of theoretical and methodological problems with this approach. It is hard to see what Wallenberg would have gained had he openly opposed the German and Hungarian authorities. According to the renowned Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, it was in fact almost impossible to question or contradict the authorities in Hungary at the time. Some Jews, he writes, were saved as a result of negotiations between Rudolph Kasztner and Eichmann, Himmler's economic agent Kurt Becher, and the efforts in Budapest of Wallenberg and others. A great many Hungarian Jews were nevertheless murdered "as the Germans and their Hungarian allies had total power in their hands, and no American, British, Russian or Jewish rescue team, no bombing of Auschwitz even, could have changed the overall picture."[7]

3 ■ Attila Lajos: *Hjälten och offren. Raoul Wallenberg och judarna i Budapest* (Växjö: Svenska Emigrantinstitutets skriftserie, 2004), pp. 45–63.

4 ■ As István Deák noticed in *Essays on Hitler's Europe* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, p. 155), present-day Hungarian nationalists have used a similar argumentation to claim that the Hungarian authorities collaborated with the Germans mainly in order to save Jewish lives. It should be stressed that Lajos does not argue this.

5 ■ Lajos, pp. 93–99, 57–63, 177–227.

6 ■ Lajos, p. 309.

7 ■ Yehuda Bauer: "Conclusion: The Holocaust in Hungary: Was Rescue Possible?", David Cesarani (ed.), *Genocide and Rescue. The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (Oxford & New York: Berg 1997, p. 207).

Furthermore, Lajos measures Wallenberg against an idealised image, which the Swedish diplomat probably never heard of and accordingly had no reason to aspire to. The conclusion that "Wallenberg helped the Jews of Budapest to help themselves, not least by serving as the basis for a universal hero figure" is arguable. The author suggests that the Swedish diplomat consciously acted in a heroic role.[8] But that was exactly his task: to save as many Jews as possible, not to create a role for himself as hero.

The main problem with Lajos' argument is that he is not consistent. The result is an inability to separate the situation in Budapest in 1944–45 from a later development of a very different kind. Lajos's objective is to put Wallenberg's efforts in perspective and highlight the attempts of other persons and organisations to save the Hungarian Jews. The difficulties, however, become obvious when Lajos is unable to present convincing arguments that the Swedish diplomat acted with the conscious intention of becoming a hero. That Wallenberg after the Second World War emerged as somewhat of a prototype of the righteous gentile was a process that he could hardly have foreseen—and he had no possibility whatsoever of influencing it. Lajos is judging Wallenberg in the light of the latter's posthumous heroic status.

A closely related, and perhaps even larger, problem with Lajos's book is that implies his definition of heroism i.e., that a hero must act according to his own high moral standards, regardless of the situation and the structures that are in place. Modern views are broader than that. The German psychoanalyst Otto Rank for example claims that the origin of the classical hero-story was in the form of a "career". The means and ways of achieving glory, power and the throne, which was the natural end station for the classical heroes, were seldom of any great importance.[9] The social historian Dixon Wecter, who in *The Hero in America* argued that hero-worship is to be seen as a secular religion, also emphasises the close connection between hero and myth.[10] Erel Shalit notes the close connection between the personal level and the individual need to feel a belonging to the society and the collective processes in which past heroes and heroic deeds are linked to contemporary issues and to expectations of a future and more secure society.[11] From these studies the fairly obvious conclusion can be drawn that it is not sufficient to restrict studies to ideal definitions. They must be supplemented with contextualisations of the historical and social settings in which heroes act and in which their elevated status is created and mediated.

Much has been written on Wallenberg, but with a focus on his actions in Budapest and his whereabouts in the Soviet Union. Fewer efforts have been made to write about why Wallenberg became a hero in the Western world after the war and about the different motives for his heroic status in different places and in different periods. Lajos tries to do a bit of both. He presents some new findings of what actually took place in Budapest 1944–45, which are of importance. On the other hand, he fails to combine the professional historian's traditional yearning to demolish well-established myths with the more recent interest in studying symbolic meanings of a past event. He is equipped with few, if any, relevant scholarly tools to solve this latter task. ❧

8 ■ Lajos, p. 315.

9 ■ Otto Rank: *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero. A Psychological Exploration of Myth* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004 [1922]).

10 ■ Dixon Wecter: *The Hero in America. A Chronicle of Hero-Worship* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966 [1941]), pp. 5–10.

11 ■ Erel Shalit: *The Hero and His Shadow. Psychopolitical Aspects of Myth and Reality in Israel* (Lanham, New York & Oxford: University Press of America 1999), pp. xv–xvi.

Paul Griffiths

Early and New Polyphonies

New Budapest Music Center Releases

A bunch of new releases from Budapest Music Center Records confirm the old suspicion that we are living through a renascent Renaissance—that music now is looping back, around the enormous obstacle of the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods (of everything, in other words, that passes for 'standard repertory'), to walk alongside what was being composed half a millennium ago.

The point is made quite explicitly in *Offertorium* (BMC CD 090), an anthology of music old and new presented by Trio Lignum, whose members are two clarinettists (Csaba Klenyán and Lajos Rozmán) and a bassoonist (György Lakatos). These players work together admirably: all are fine musicians, and the two suave clarinets are nicely offset by the woodier, tangier bassoon. One listens to the whole recording—or almost all of it—with delight. Curiously, the performers sound freer in the older music than in the pieces written for them, which can make the new music sound older than the old—stiffer, cramped with age. For example, where Klenyán (I guess) turns the principal line of Machaut's *Ma fin est mon commencement* into a cool jazz solo (in successive verses the piece's other two parts will be added one by one), the trio sound cautious working through Zoltán Jeney *Quand j'étais jeune, on me disait*—perhaps justly, since this contribution casts back to the organum of a century and more before Machaut. Two of Jeney's colleagues in the New Music Studio are also represented, and their pieces tell the same story. László Sáry's *Chromatic Game* and László Vidovszky's *Berçeuse canonique* echo the simultaneous discrete tempos of early polyphony, while Sáry's *Five Repeated* does this too, but in the form of a lively dance game, which at last gives the players room to loosen up. They also have fun with the ornamented lines and runs of an *In Nomine* by John Bull, after which András Soós's *Verba mea* perhaps sounds oldest of all in recalling Webern and stimulating an objective style of performance.

A complete album of Vidovszky's music (BMC CD 075) couples two sets of music for strings: Zwölf Streichquartette (2000),

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performed by the Auer Quartet, and Twelve Duos for violin and viola (1987–9), in an older recording by András Keller and Zoltán Gál. Typically with Vidovszky all is strange, and so it is here. The members of each set, though contrasting, are by no means independent: the composer wants them all played, and in the order given. But neither can these be regarded as twelve-movement works, for there is no sense of growth or advance through the 45 minutes of the quartet set or the 20 minutes of the duos. Perhaps the closest traditional model is the set of études, often similarly offered in batches of a dozen; these are—especially the quartet pieces, which are beautifully played—studies in texture and technique. The first, in abrupt chords, is followed by a slow canon involving non-vibrato notes rising and falling in amplitude, then by another canon that sounds like a spring breeze and vanishes. Quite a number of the pieces do that, leaving the impression one has caught just a swatch of some lengthier, perhaps infinite musical material. Altogether the set is well worth hearing—and well worth performing, possibly (if the composer would permit) with other works interspersed. The duos might similarly be programmed with Mozart's pieces for this combination. Here the recording is rather harsh, but Vidovszky's abstracted poetry—poetry that is at once intimate and cryptic—comes across. As he notes (and his booklet essay is in the same dodecapartite form), violin and viola, without double stops (here eschewed) and in non-standard tonalities, can convey only incomplete consonances, which may contribute to the music's sense of frailty and loss.

A similar sense pervades the pieces by Barnabás Dukay recorded on *Over the face of the deep* (BMC CD 052). The title piece—in full, *Mist hovering over the face of the deep*—is given in four versions, for quartets of violas, tenors, altos and marimbas, each of them breathing through slow phrases of close, rapt dissonance to the next consonance, somewhat as if a Bach chorale had been invaded by the spirit of Ligeti. Louder pieces interrupt: musical mobiles, in which notes come and go and return, again at a slowish tempo, with the minimum forward movement—immobile mobiles, as it were. Two of these bigger (and longer) pieces are for mixed ensemble; the third is for the string nonet Bach used in his third Brandenburg Concerto, which again suggests a programming idea. The presence of Trio Lignum among Dukay's other performers comes as a probably necessary reminder that Hungarian composers, though so many and diverse, are working inside a small country.

Another of Dukay's musicians is the flautist Zoltán Gyöngyössy, who presents an album (BMC CD 074) entirely devoted to pieces by his countrymen. Outstanding here are five short pieces by Kurtág, among them a line of implicit two-part polyphony on a folksong tag *(Hommage à J.S.B.),* an utterly simple lament in broken phrases, touchingly played (Doloroso), and a caressing echo song, summoning a world in which two flutes could play from mountaintops to one another (*C'erano due fiori,* with Gergely Ittzés). Among the other items, Sáry's appealing *Magnificat,* involving the luminous soprano Krisztina Jónás, bounces within small sets somewhat in folk style (*Five Repeated,* from the Trio Lignum collection, is a bit like this), the flute part continuous while the soprano enters now and then. Gyöngyössy's own Duo, which again he plays with Ittzés, features a host of special effects: breathy sounds, pedal tones, pianissimos, percussive playing.

More Kurtág comes on a sampling of *Játékok* (BMC CD 123), in which Gábor Csalog is the principal pianist—a foretaste of the complete recorded edition in preparation. This preliminary disc, which includes pieces from all eight volumes of the still growing collection, provides a happy complement to the recording the composer made with his wife Márta (ECM New Series 1619), there being almost no overlap of repertory and yet a similar shapeliness in the selection. The fifty-eight items are set out in two roughly equal 'parts', as if this were a recital, which is perhaps odd but not ineffective. Each part draws an arc from innocence to experience, in terms not only of the selections—pieces from the first volume, small to tiny in size, give way to later and larger items—but also of the playing, since towards the end of each part Csalog brings his programme to a culmination and hands over to the Kurtágs. In the first part Csalog's 'Hommage à Ferenc Berényi 70', breathtakingly fresh, delicate and cool, is followed by Márta Kurtág's warm yet unaffected rendering of the folksong-like 'Apple-flower', after which she goes on to *'...emlékek, kicsi ólomkatonák...'* *('...memories, little tin soldiers...'*, a quotation from Attila József), with a strain from 'Apple-flower' featuring among the echoes. The composer then sums up with 'Medal—in memoriam Lajos Hernádi', where the piano seems at one moment to go underwater, and where each little detached note counts. (Hernádi, who died in 1986 at the age of eighty, was a pianist, and a colleague of Kurtág's at the Liszt Academy.) Also, since the Kurtágs are recorded on an upright, it is as if we zoom in from the concert hall to their domestic surroundings; the gain is of intimacy as well as expressive potency. But Csalog, too, can make the piano speak, as he does, for instance, in the growling left-hand countermelody of 'In memoriam Ilona Rozsnyai'.

Also from Csalog comes an idea he brings off brilliantly, that of having two alliterative Hungarians, Liszt and Ligeti, talking to each other in the prestissimo phonemes of piano virtuosity (BMC CD 095). Nine Ligeti études more or less alternate with eight by Liszt, taken mostly from his transcendental set. 'Paysage', by the elder composer, opens quite naturally out of the wandering consonances of the younger's 'Cordes à vide'. 'Waldesrauschen', following the similar iterations of 'Der Zauberlehrling', begins to sound like another Ligeti étude—and then 'Galamb borong' could be a memento of Liszt's visit to Indonesia. 'Automne à Varsovie', which completed Ligeti's first book, is only one season away from Liszt's 'Chasse-neige', which comes immediately before it, and from the same world of flurry and lament.

Finally, Zoltán Kocsis and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra present another unexpected coupling, of Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* with Varèse's *Amériques* (BMC CD 102). As Kocsis remarks in the booklet, 'many hidden threads link the two compositions on this disc', as indeed they do. One of those threads goes by the name of Richard Strauss, for Strauss in Berlin was mentor both to Schoenberg at the time of *Pelleas* (1902–3) and to Varèse a decade later, before he moved to New York and celebrated his arrival in *Amériques*. Both these works are symphonic poems, in which the genre's essential idea of representation by gesture is pushed to an almost self-destructive climax. Both are scored for a large late-Romantic orchestra, and both give rich and characterful work to the winds. Varèse, however, is ahead

of Schoenberg in emphasizing also the percussion, and there are other points of divergence. For example, though both works have a main motif that returns often, Schoenberg's theme has a 19th-century Austro-German ancestry of expressive melody, whereas Varèse's is a ritual instrument, a modal idea whose relative blankness helps it function largely as an obsessive device. Correspondingly, Varèse creates a monumental architecture with giant blocks of sound in place of Schoenberg's developmental continuity. Indeed, an entire course in early 20th-century music could be given with just this record as example—especially given that these are tremendous performances, recorded at concerts in 2001 and 2002. Kocsis makes the weight of both works tell, but there is lightness, too, in how adroitly such large masses move, and in the transparency of texture. Both performances are full of breathtaking moments, and the Varèse, which usually sounds hamstrung by its debts to *Le Sacre du printemps* (as Stravinsky was unkind enough to point out), here has a face all its own, with exciting work from Amadinda in the percussion parts and with everyone giving the piece a uniquely Varèsian attack. ❧

Erratum

Footnote #45 in Tibor Frank's article "Anglophiles" (*The Hungarian Quarterly*, No. 181, Vol. 47, Spring 2006, p. 70) was misprinted. It should correctly read as follows:

45 ■ Pethő Sándor, Róma és Pannónia [Rome and Pannonia], *Magyar Nemzet*, October 29, 1939. I am grateful to my dear old friend Mrs. Éva Kerekes for donating to me her substantial international collection of wartime clippings which includes this article.

Tamás Koltai

Private History

Ignác Nagy: *Tisztújítás* (Local Election); Kornél Hamvai: *Castel Felice;* István Eörsi: *Halálom reggelén* (The Morning of My Death)

By history we usually mean the social and political events that we measure by universal standards and from which we single out those turning-points that affect all or most of us. Historical drama makes up a considerable portion of dramatic literature, for it purveys the private histories through which the theatre can shed light on history.

In the weeks prior to the parliamentary election of 2006, the József Attila Theatre in Budapest chose to present a well-written 19th-century comedy, *Tisztújítás* (Local Election) by Ignác Nagy. In a provincial city, love and political intrigues are set off against the background of a local election and all the manipulations it entails. The author may no longer be well known, but reference books call him the Hungarian Eugène Sue. Critics quickly recognized that, just like Sue, Ignác Nagy was exploring the depths and mysteries of his rapidly growing capital city. Dealing with gaming houses, thieves' dens, rookeries, cemeteries, 'angel-makers' (as illegal abortionists were called) was strikingly novel, even daring at a time when the 'glories of old' took pride of place amongst literary topics. Ignác Nagy can also be considered a pioneer of modern journalism in Hungary, and it is with him too that literary people started to look down on journalists in Hungary. He published prolifically, wrote novels, plays, short stories and humorous sketches. He also made good money—another thing his contemporaries disdained him for. He edited a drama anthology and launched the famous *Hölgyfutár* (Ladies's Courier). And in 1842 he wrote *Local Election.*

This comedy is the first Hungarian political satire for the stage. In it Nagy does more than sketch contemporary politics: he vindicates his right to shape it. His plot takes place in those venues where the nobility conducts its public life, rather than in the manor houses his predecessors favoured; his play is imbued with irony rather than the jovial humour they preferred. His predecessors still believed in the revival associated with the Reform Age. He is more sceptical. He sees those in power at the county level as conspiring to preserve obsolete traditions, and the self-appointed champions of progress as looking only to pave the way for their own advancement and accession to power. The perennial topicality of the theme is obvious, the perception hardly an astonishing insight. But it still provides for an enjoyable night at the theatre, seasoned with sharp wit.

Tamás Koltai

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The première in 1843 at the National Theatre was the greatest theatrical success ever achieved by a Hungarian play up to then. The audience reaction was inspired not by the plot—a vapid tale of romantic intrigue—but by the sheer novelty of political satire, with its ironic presentation of those in public life, of corrupt officials and underhand electoral practices. The story boils down to that of an honest candidate winning the post of deputy Lord Lieutenant of the country ahead of two dishonest rivals and, with the post, the hand of a beautiful widow. The other two campaign for him, perceiving him to be the underdog, rather than against one another. For an adaptation that left the plot untouched, the company turned to Lajos Parti Nagy, one of the most stylistically creative of contemporary writers and himself a playwright of eminence. Parti Nagy's *trouvailles* are innumerable and, for the most part, untranslatable. He retained the archaic artfulness of the text, contorting it to fit a modern idiom. The patina of obsolete usage remains, the coinages of the early 19th-century language reform are amusingly mixed with some of today's distorted usage and grammatical structures, neatly exposing the primitive mindset of the characters concerned. Behind style of speech, however, one must find a character. The director, Iván Hargitai, contents himself with rough wise-cracking; this is buffoonery rather than satire, the tone is closer to the vulgar than to the sophisticated. The company may have imagined that success was thus assured, but the production is the poorer for it.

Kornél Hamvai, who is, incidentally, an excellent translator of English, was very young when he achieved his first success as a playwright. His new play, *Castel Felice,* has the 1956 Revolution in the background — but more like a turn of fate about to fade into history than a direct experience—and the run-up to it. The *Castel Felice* is a ship and *la nave va*, as Fellini would say, the ship keeps sailing from Bremen to Sydney, in October 1958. On board are eight Hungarian migrants, 'dissidents', as they were called after the Revolution. Apart from Australia, various other destinations had been offered as refuges to them. The ship is a device much used for its metaphoric values and its overlapping of reality and symbol: individual and common fate, no-man's-land, between two shores, homeland effect, fatelessness, uncertainty, the road to nothingness, just to mention the obvious ones.

Hamvai combines a crime story and a drama of collective fate. The latter involves compatriots fleeing the past, for political or private reasons. Some were involved in politics, some were its victims; some are trying to erase memories of the dictatorship, others of their marriages. In vain, it turns out, and here the crime element comes into play. One passenger believes she has recognised in another the perpetrator of a murder carried out on behalf of the political police, upsetting the relationship amongst the eight. One of them goes overboard and drowns; the contacts between the rest deteriorate as the voyage continues. We never learn who the killer is—either in the old case or in the new one—indeed, we do not know if what has happened on board was really a murder. Hamvai handles the conflicts with the ease and detachment his other plays have shown. His technique is as enviably untroubled and relaxed as is his vision of the world. In *Castel Felice,* Hamvai displays his virtuosity and skill for dialogue, scratching the surface of our private psyche and our historical consciousness. What we get is entertainment, and Hamvai enjoys us getting nowhere when it all ends. (If attacked for not providing a 'national characterology' or 'national self-examination,' Hamvai would only laugh.)

Péter Valló directed the play in the Radnóti Theatre in Budapest, satisfying the

demands of the theatre of illusion. His set designer put a realistic ship's deck on the stage; the hours of the day have their appropriate atmosphere, as do the phases of the weather. The German of the announcer in Bremen and the audio montage of the arrival in Australia are perfect. If the desire had been to play it out on an elevated, abstracted level, it could have been performed on a bare stage with eight chairs —indeed, there is a reference to the mytholigical chair of forgetfulness. But then it would not be Hamvai and not the Radnóti Theatre. Here we find a scene for contemplation and calculation, and the actors are excellent. There is the harmonious duo of the elderly couple—they have not the faintest idea why they hate one another. Throughout their marriage, the husband has made his chair creak while the wife was playing the piano. There are also a gentlewoman; a girl of easy morals; an average man who is lost without his glasses, but full-blooded when in possession of them (he is the one who goes overboard); a mysterious stranger; an anguished female teacher who has all of Sydney's main and side streets off by heart; and a suspect who insists he is not the culprit (indeed either he is not or he has committed so many murders that he cannot remember). Such is the Hungarian cargo of the ship, plus the burden of history which the passengers are unable to discard.

István Eörsi, who died quite recently, wrote *Halálom reggelén* (The Morning of My Death). He was a poet, writer, journalist, essayist and, above all, a man of integrity. He was one of the formerly devoted Communist intellectuals committed to the 1956 Revolution, which earned him several years in gaol. Eörsi wrote the play in 2000, but it was only performed recently.

The theme he tackles is history at a remove, in so far as whatever Eörsi says displays the dialectics of the philosophy of history. Here he is concerned with the last day in the life of Heinrich von Kleist, but in another sense it is about his life after death. More precisely, it is about the model and his re-creator on the stage. The temperaments, lifestyles and philosophies of life of the two men couldn't have been more apart. The author of *Michael Kohlhaas,* the plays *Prince Frederick of Homburg, Penthesilea* and *The Broken Pitcher* was a man torn between extremes of thought and sentiments, fighting his own demons, who fled into suicide. In contrast, Eörsi loved life stubbornly; he enjoyed emotional and intellectual pleasures and was also at ease when making clear and rational judgments. The death metaphor offered by his recent passing away paradoxically intrudes into the production at Kaposvár. In Scene One, with Kleist already dead, between the innkeeper and his wife, a local peasant and Kleist's friends, or rather, acquaintances, whom he had summoned to the scene and who are expected to carry out his last wishes. The deceased, then, can see and hear what is being said about him and his death. The bizarre situation brings to mind a recent event when the mortally ill Péter Halász, the enfant terrible of Hungarian theatre, founder in the 1980s of the off-off Broadway Squat Theatre in New York, laid himself out in state, invited his friends to deliver their parting tributes and, in effect, witnessed his own funeral. The opening idea of Eörsi's play—Kleist's return to the scene of his life and his projection of a similar wish onto another character—is completely characteristic of him. To lose our body weight like a dancer or a puppet, to fly out of the body "despite our desires, to perch back on the mass we had managed to leave behind" (as he says in the play), is a thought typical of both Kleist and Eörsi.

Further similarities may be found between the hedonist Eörsi and the suicidal Kleist, who notoriusly persuaded Henriette Vogel to join him in suicide. He first ended the life of the young woman, at her

request—she was suffering from an incurable cancer of the womb. Kleist then ended his own life. After the opening, which presents the envoi as a prelude, the play continues with the fictitious events that took place the night before the act was committed on the shore of the Wannsee. Eörsi is interested in Kleist above all; he looks upon Henriette as a mere extra, despite the loving friendship between her and Kleist. This is not a melodrama, but an elevated, almost euphoric calm of opting for the only possible solution. We see a man who is drawing up a balance sheet before suicide, a man who could never be identified with the roles he played. More precisely, he felt uncertain in all the roles that society and biology forced upon him to play, including those he undertook of his own will: the Prussian patriot, the soldier, the scholar and the man of letters. He also felt uncertain in those roles he refused to undertake (thus, the civil servant) and the one meted out by nature, that of a man. In his last night he surveys the chances of the past one by one; he fantasises about his beloved sister in an imaginary marriage in which she is the man and himself the woman, until he concludes that "no one can help me on this earth"—the words taken from Kleist's last letter. Suicide is nothing else but a stepping out from all these roles, a release from all social and moral bonds that had caused him unresolvable conflicts. Such was Eörsi's agenda too, with the difference that Kleist fulfilled it with his death, and Eörsi with his life.

The Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár, Eörsi's second home, where he worked as a dramaturge, came up with a sensible and fine production. Director Andor Lukáts conceived of the play as a spectacle in which the basic scene, the room at the inn, shares a space with the taproom of the prelude, the opening scene set behind an imaginary glass window (sterile and almost immobile, like a picture out of a dream) and the misty atmosphere of the lakeshore is indicated by a projection of the water surface and dead leaves. Before the play opens, we see on video a bare tree, a greyish scene and black crows flying up from the tree; the static picture exudes a lethargic atmosphere. The same scene appears for a short time after the pre(post)lude, at the end the crows are flying towards us, growing in size until, finally, with an editing flourish, they turn into a host of flying people in black. The association with the crowing crowd in the taproom, who speak about death and are dressed in black is obvious, without being offensive.

Unkempt and languishing in appearance and physique, Kleist is a childishly jovial figure, reflexive and self-reflexive. His jeering presence as he almost invisibly insinuates and embarrasses the black-dressed burghers is an apt metaphor for the intellect that is perplexing even after death. There is a meditative forgetfulness in the way he prepares for his death. The way he walks about barefoot in a night-shirt, with a doorknob left in his pocket from the 'afterlife', wading through the water ditch and pulling up or taking off his pants, reveals he is as undecided about his death as about his life, though he handles it with stoicism. The 'insert' scene, in which he pictures his sister in bed in a man's suit, is a grotesque play on exchanging gender. Marie, the sister, appears as a frivolous picture in a dream, though not immaterial at all. Preparing for his last journey, the candidate for suicide is calmly drinking his wine and eating a cut of meat—this is the director-actor's addition to the portrait of a hedonist, more Eörsi than Kleist perhaps, and he starts out for the picnic, which is to end in death, with three pistols hidden in the basket. The story, however, does not end with death. The intellect released from the prison of the body is floating in the air above us and our terrible world. Kleists's and Eörsi's. ❧

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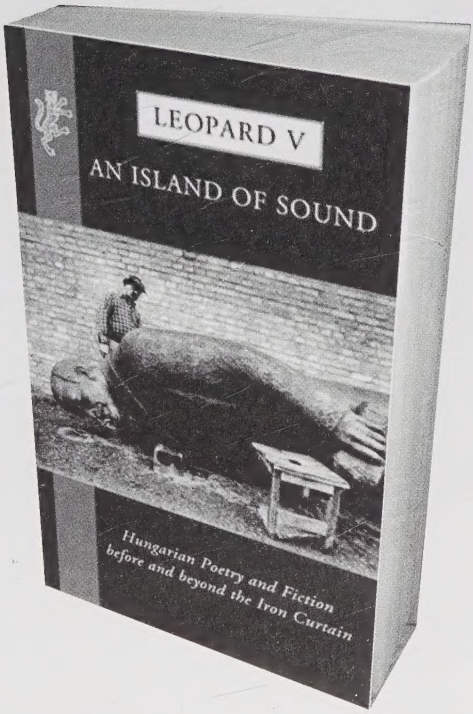

AN ISLAND OF SOUND

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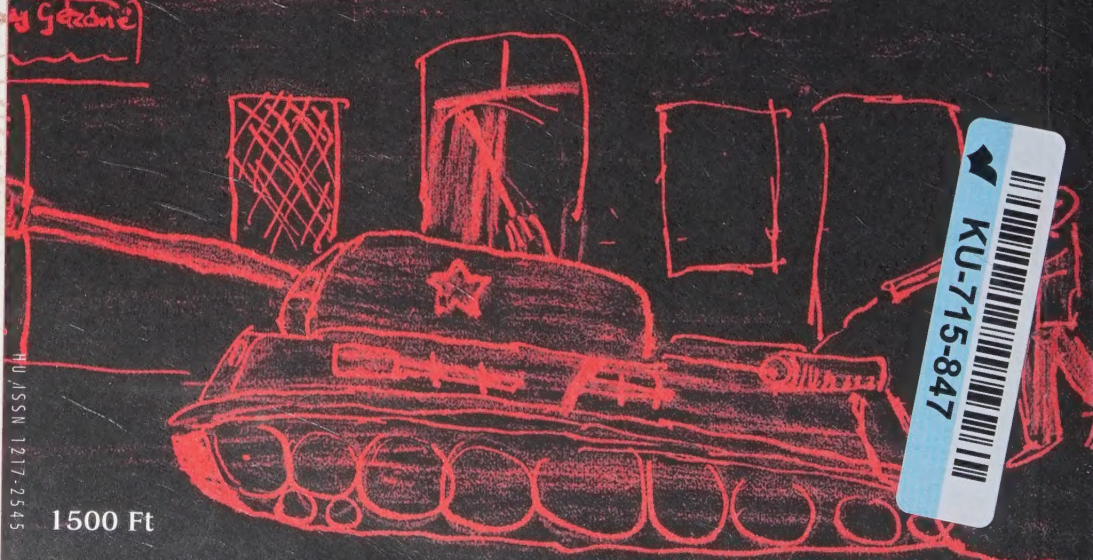
In the morning Jancsi was over at our place. Both of us wrote in our diaries. In the afternoon I went to report to my violin teacher from the music school. He wasn't there, and until he came back Aunt Erzsike showed me how the apartment was hit. The shell came in the room with the balcony, it tore right through the wall and went into the other room, where it exploded, sending shrapnel flying even to the third floor. It caused lots of damage. It tore apart a closet, a couch, some famous paintings and a Japanese vase. Once I got a time for my lesson, I went home. At night I read **Slaves of God.**

182

***God Bless the Hungarians!** – From a childhood diary kept in 1956-57 by Gyula Csics, pp. 70 –103.*



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